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COSEY

UNDERGROUND RESISTER

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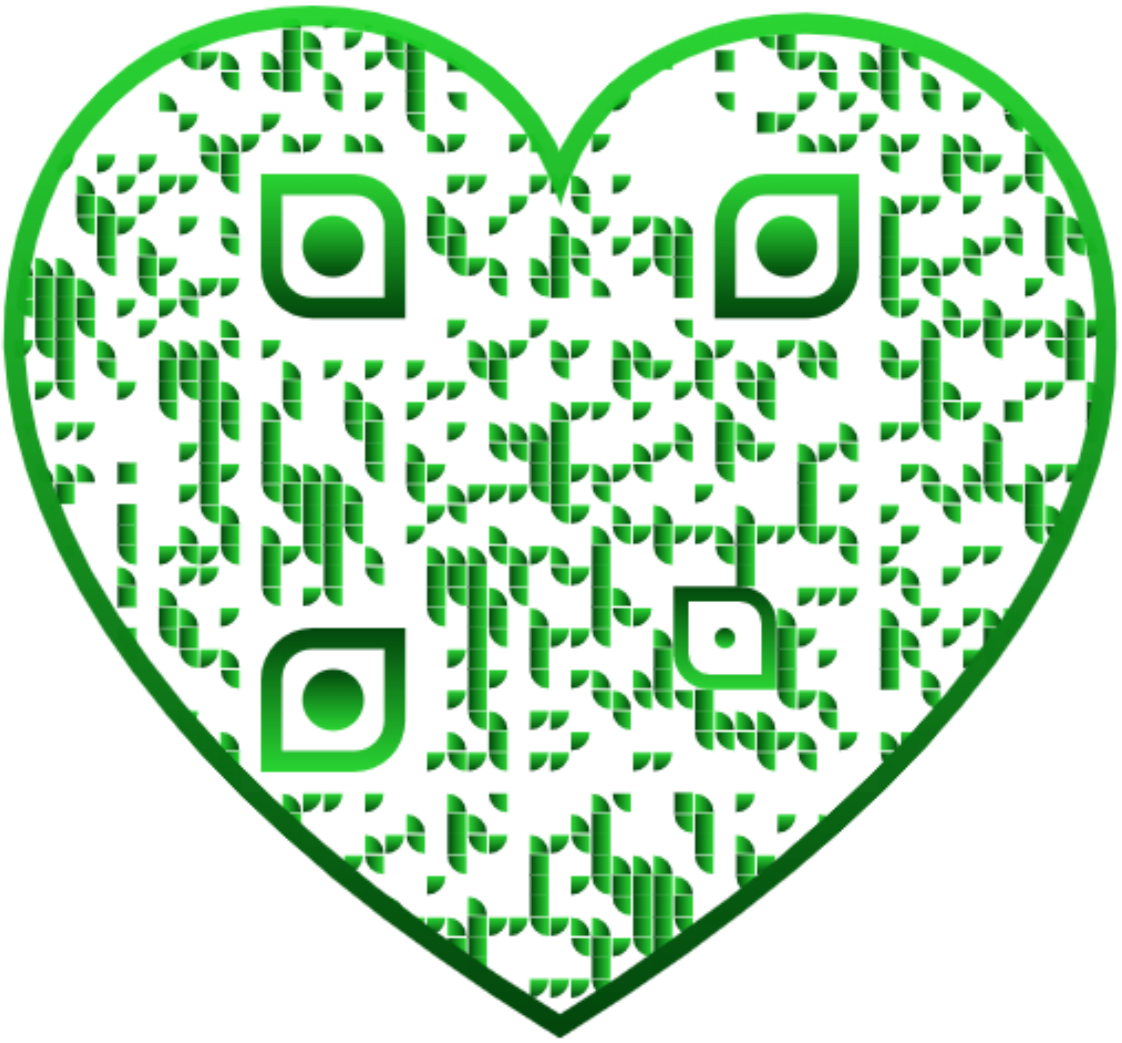
HYGGE



WELCOME TO ELECTRONIC SOUND

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It's hard to think of anyone in the world of electronic sound who commands more respect than Cosey Fanni Tutti. It's easy to understand why that is, though. From her earliest work with the radical performance group COUM Transmissions and her pivotal role in Throbbing Gristle, through her many years as half of Chris & Cosey and more recently Carter Tutti, she has never compromised on her art. Not for one second. Even when she flirted with pop – and pop doesn't come any better than Chris & Cosey's 'October (Love Song)' – it was always on her terms.

As Neil Mason writes in this month's cover feature, the publication of Cosey's 2017 autobiography, 'Art Sex Music', "compounded the admiration of those familiar with her, as well as attracting a whole new audience". Her new book, 'Re-Sisters', looks set to do the same. As well as containing further autobiographical material, it details the lives of electronic music pioneer Delia Derbyshire and a medieval mystic named Margery Kempe, exploring the many connections between Cosey, Delia and Margery across the centuries. It's an epic work, and the fact that it's out at the same time as Cosey's brilliant soundtrack to Caroline Catz's film about Delia Derbyshire means the subject of Delia looms large in our absorbing interview.

We have a strong supporting cast for this issue too. Michael Rother talks about his 50 years in the music industry, including his often fractious relationship with Neu! partner Klaus Dinger, while another of our major interviews is Editors, whose line-up now features Benjamin John Power, better known to us as Blanck Mass. We also have William Orbit, The Advisory Circle, Gabe Gurnsey, Clare Grogan and Maximum Joy, plus a piece about Einstürzende Neubauten playing a gig with Showaddywaddy in London in 1987, which must be one of the oddest pairings ever. We're hoping to interview Aphex Twin about his Mud remixes next month.

Before we let you go, just a quick reminder that our lovely new website is up and running. You'll find a ton of archive material from back issues of the magazine on there, plus a growing number of exclusive live sessions which we're filming at our very own Electronic Sound studio space. We have six sessions on the site for you to enjoy already, with Blancmange, GLOK, Alice Hubble, Rodney Cromwell, Gemma Cullingford and Luke Sanger leading the way. You can watch one track from each session free of charge, with the full sessions available to premium subscribers at just £5 a month. Get yourself over to electronicsound.co.uk and take a look.

Electronically yours,
Push and Mark

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KRAFTWERK

Field Day, Victoria Park, London

20 AUGUST 2022

WORDS: JEREMY ALLEN
PICTURE: ANDREW WHITTON

Field Day has returned to its ohm sweet ohm in Victoria Park, and a headline slot from Kraftwerk only adds to the merriment. There's no new material to get excited about, of course, but it's all about the "Vorsprung durch Technik". Kling Klang brings incremental improvements to live proceedings directly inverse to the downward trajectory of modern life. So, rejoice!

There's even some visual fun too – a map of the UK projected onto a huge screen during 'Spacelab' features a GPS pin hovering over London, then photographic evidence of a Kraftwerkian UFO alighting on this very field in Hackney earlier in the day. It's the special effects equivalent of a personalised greeting card from Moonpig.

Kraftwerk are as reassuringly efficient as we've come to expect. Karl Bartos sneered recently about their "Synclavier years" – three-and-a-half decades of digitisation, refinement and process – though if Ralf Hütter is arguably more bureaucrat than musician these days, he's living proof that the world needs its administrators.

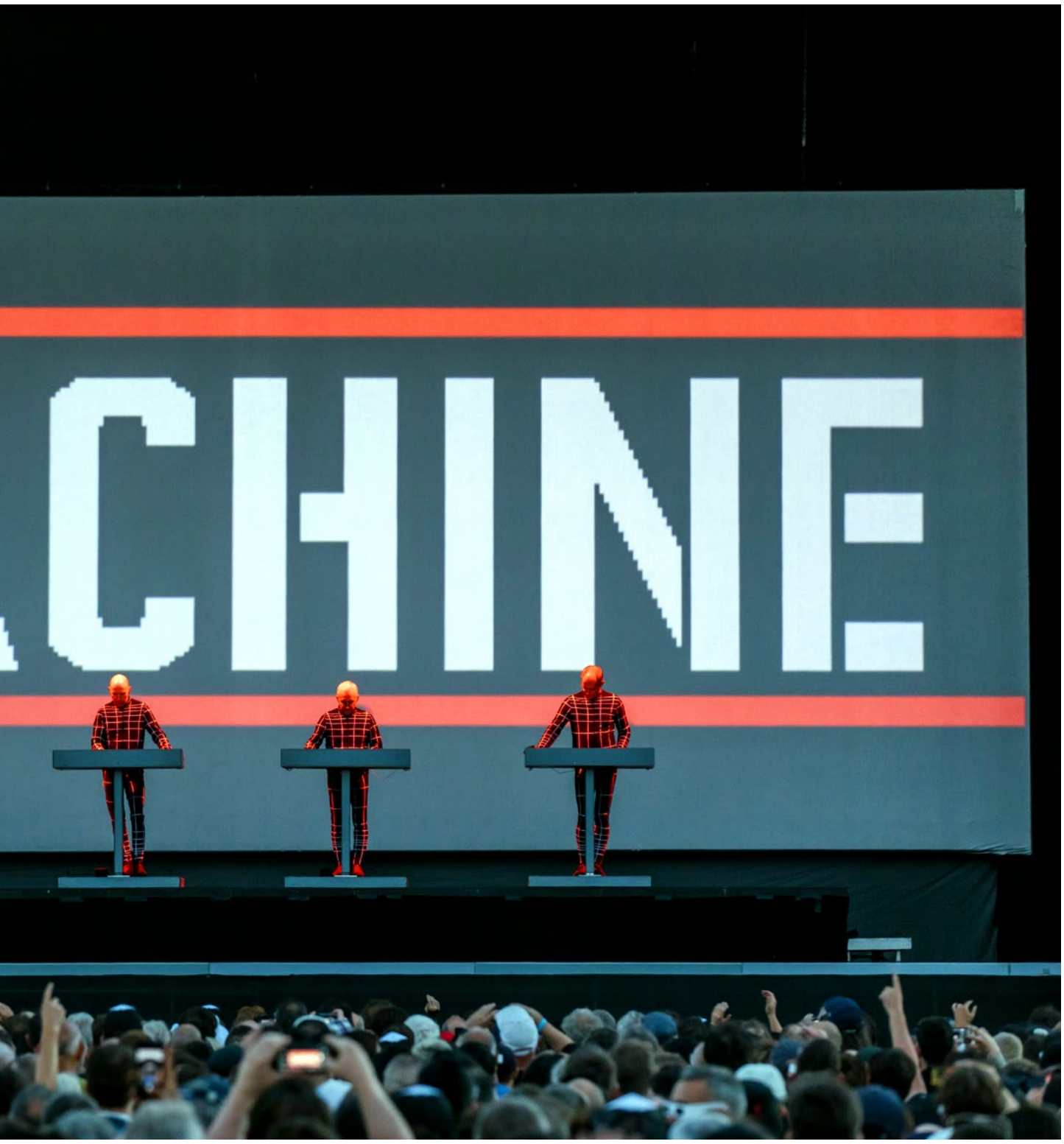
Fights break out in the audience between old-timers and a new variant of sunburned hipster, but onstage, Hütter and his three well-drilled cohorts are as reassuringly static as ever. If there's been no radical overhaul of the presentation in nearly two decades of reanimation, everything else is improved upon. The 3D glasses work fabulously well now, and many of the remixes have been tweaked to perfection with the beats, well… *beatier*. Most importantly, the latest installation is more conducive to dancing and enjoying the communal spectacle.

Elsewhere on site, The Chemical Brothers' breakbeats might be detectable in all 22 East London postcodes as they explode like Semtex into the night sky, but Kraftwerk can draw upon vestiges that nobody else can, and switch things around to push buttons others can't reach.

The bossa breakdown during a delightfully brassy version of 'The Model' sounds like a João Gilberto foray into drum 'n' bass, and the black and white footage of vintage fashion models is a nice touch too. Another time, we enter a simulation of the original Emil Schult artwork for 'Autobahn', pottering around in a VW Beetle as the convergence lines of the road come at us.

It's these clever touches that have an emotional effect on gig-goers, especially if they're Kraftwerk diehards who've spent hours invested in the sleeve art. The onomatopoeia of 'Boing Boom Tschak' sparkles as the sun goes down, and at the end, 'Musique Non Stop' leaves us wanting so much more when the music actually does stop.

A lot is made of how clinical Kraftwerk are these days, but as Ralf Hütter stands on his own at the denouement, and then exits stage right under dense red light, some dust flings itself mercilessly into my eye.


CHINE

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C. Visit electronicsound.co.uk/cosey to buy this release on its own for £8.99, but be quick because stocks are strictly limited

Cosey Fanni Tutti
‘Guitar (Twickenham Studio 3) Redux’ / ‘Amplitude’
Yellow vinyl seven-inch

This month’s exclusive seven-inch features two superb Cosey tracks connected to her soundtrack for Caroline Catz’s ‘Delia Derbyshire: The Myths And The Legendary Tapes’ film – one of them a remix and the other previously unreleased

‘GUITAR (TWICKENHAM STUDIO 3) REDUX’

“Caroline [Catz] asked me to appear in ‘Delia Derbyshire: The Myths And The Legendary Tapes’ as well as doing the soundtrack,” says Cosey. “When she first spoke to me about it, I said, ‘Oh I don’t know, I don’t want to spoil your film’.

“For one of the scenes I was in, they asked me to set up my studio – the ghostly Cosey studio – and then shot me working on the soundtrack while actually appearing in the film! ‘Guitar (Twickenham Studio 3) Redux’ is a remix of a track which came out of that session.

“Working on the fly like that is very different to my usual approach when I’m recording. Everyone was on set – the actors, the crew – and it gives you a distinctive feeling when you’ve got a bit of an audience. I was just jamming with myself and doing my thing, running it all through the Space Echo and the various other effects I often use. I played some cornet as well, but this track was mostly just the guitar.

“Why does the title refer to ‘Twickenham Studio 3’? The scene was shot at the famous Twickenham Film Studios in west London. Chris [Carter] and I saw The Beatles’ ‘Get Back’ documentary recently and we were trying to figure out if we’d been in the same studio as the one they’d used in 1969. When we first saw it we were saying, ‘That looks like the one we were in for the Delia film, doesn’t it?’. It did look like the same place. Anyway, there are several studios there and I wanted to be able to place exactly where this track was done. Hence ‘Twickenham Studio 3’.

‘AMPLITUDE’

“‘Amplitude’ is a previously unheard and unreleased track that came from an idea I’d originally had while I was doing the Delia soundtrack,” reveals Cosey. “I recorded loads of material for the project, some of which didn’t get included.

“I was using tape and an EMS Synthi, and I was working off Delia’s old patch sheets, all of which were fairly unpredictable, so I decided to record everything as I went along. I’d then go back and figure out what might be good for this or that part of the film, as well as what was definitely not suitable but might be interesting to keep for a possible future project.

“It was a great way to work, especially because I know Delia used to do that sort of thing too. I could see that from her notes. Whatever she was working on, she’d always be generating material for other projects. It was like she was working in the present and in the future at the same time. So with the soundtrack, I kept coming across things that made me think, ‘This is just so me, I can work with that’, or ‘This would make a great rhythm sequence for that other piece I’ve been thinking about’. I was doing that all the time and that’s where ‘Amplitude’ came from.

“Recording everything is quite an analogue way of working, though. You do it because you never know when or if you’ll ever hear the sounds you’re making again. I don’t always work like that, but I did it a lot more with this project because I was searching for sounds to fit with the images, and I was never sure when I might have needed something.”

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MOTORHEAD

Polysynth from down under is a showstopper

First unveiled at NAMM 2022, NINA is Melbourne Instruments' new 12-voice analogue and digital hybrid polysynth. Capable of generating complex and rich sounds, with onboard effects to boot, the real headline-grabbing feature is its motorised control panel, which can automatically adjust its knobs at the press of a button for instant modulation and patch recall. Aside from just looking awesome, it solves the finicky problem of having confusing preset values that don't correspond correctly with knob positions. You can preorder a unit now for $3,000 (US dollars, that is) with shipping in December.
melbourneinstruments.com

PULSE

NINA KOHOUT

Slovakian teen bringing new life to folk

WHO?

Combining dark, Eastern European folk music with trip hop beats is Nina Kohout, a 19-year-old Slovakian singer-songwriter with the voice of an avenging angel. "I was part of a folklore group for more than 10 years," she says. "We used to sing and dance to hundreds of old Slovak songs filled with stories, some of them rawer than others. I can still feel their distant echoes within me." It's a family tradition, too. Dad (Peter Kohout) is the sax player in electro-folk band Autumnist, who Nina has frequently appeared with. "When other kids my age went to the cinema at weekends, I was backstage at festivals," she explains. "So the soundtrack to my childhood was the bands my dad played in. After we played together in Autumnist, my dad started to accompany me in my solo project, and we inhale and exhale the music in absolute harmony."

WHY NINA KOHOUT?

Just listen to 'Love Above', the opening track from her startling debut EP 'Pandemonium'. The pianos are hymnal and the strings funereal, but Nina's voice drags them screaming to the heavens. These are gothic fairytales worthy of a young Kate Bush, and Nina has moved to Blighty to pursue her musical ambitions. "At the age of 17, it took all the courage I had to leave my home country and move to London," she says. Following in the footsteps of Amy Winehouse and Adele, she's now studying at the BRIT School in Croydon.

TELL US MORE...

What does 'Prebúdzanka' mean, the title of the EP's breathtaking closing track? "It's a made-up word I came up with!" chuckles Nina. "It means the exact opposite of a lullaby, so it's a song someone would sing to their loved one just after waking up. I believe those few undisturbed seconds between sleep and wakefulness represent the purest state of human existence."

BOB FISCHER

'Pandemonium' is out now on Deadred

YEASTY BOYS

First “bio record” is grown by Korean artist

“The future of music is biological,” declares Mikael Hwang, the scientist-turned-producer behind an installation which involves living yeast cells being injected into a hollow record. Under his alias of Psients, Hwang has become the creator of the world’s first playable medium that is mediated by microorganisms.

“‘Signal’ consists of three components – the installation, the object and the music – and is inspired by biology lab practices of culturing microorganisms in petri dishes, and my persistent love for electronic music,” writes Hwang. The installation featured earlier this year at South Korea’s Paradise Art Lab Festival, and the digital EP is available to listen to online. **psients.com**

PATCH TEST

Innovative sequencer module ahoy

As the latest offering from Eventide, Misha is a sequencer module with the potential to inject some serious musical pedigree into your patches. With a workflow that harks back to the tone row methods employed in Serialism, a compositional technique pioneered by Austrian-American composer Arnold Schoenberg, Misha bases its sequencing not on the note values themselves, but on the intervals between notes. Employing any of the hundreds of scales to create patterns, its intuitive layout presents a series of coloured buttons and a display showing sequences as circles, not lines, while also offering an onboard oscillator for instant, standalone sonic exploration. For $599, it’s a cracking addition to your arsenal. **eventideaudio.com**

SHHE: D Ý R A

At this year’s Edinburgh Fringe, our man on the ground finds **SHHE** cooking up an ambient storm

WORDS: JEREMY ALLEN

With Covid restrictions finally lifted this year, the Edinburgh Festival was back to its raucous, anarchic best. But away from the crowds, the hordes of leafleters and innumerous performers, a tranquil space called D Ý R A emerged in the basement of the Summerhall cultural village.

Created by Scottish-Portuguese artist Su Shaw (who records under the alias SHHE) with the intention of bringing a little bit of equilibrium back to the Fringe, the installation invites you to dive deep into an immersive soundtrack and take some much-needed time out. All you need to do is kick off your shoes, lie back, and allow the ambient waves wrought from ASMR-inducing field recordings of dramatic weather to take you someplace else – somewhere north of Edinburgh.

Within a womb-like space, powered with gloriously inclement quadraphonic sound and replete with subtle, ambient purples and blues, a little bit of Iceland is transported to us. In collaboration with light designer Emma Jones and set designer Adrian Murray, Shaw’s piece is inspired by the Dýrafjörður fjord in the north-western Ísafjarðarbær municipality.

“The idea for D Ý R A began during a residency in a small village in Iceland’s Westfjords called Þingeyri, in 2018,” explains Shaw. “As part of the residency, I had access to a studio space, and prior to arriving, I’d devised a set plan of how I might use my time there – the places I would visit, days I would spend indoors, and days I’d be outdoors in the landscape.”

Shaw had other plans too, but she found herself snowbound due to literal Arctic conditions, making her unable to even get into her designated studio on the other side of the village. However, she was surprised by the positive effects being marooned had on her.

“I found both a patience and an immediacy with recording, and I began to think of the ways that I could sonically map the fjord, to recreate the meditative effects that I had experienced,” she says.

A life-changing event brought on by the natural predispositions of the atmosphere in that part of the world led to this remarkable art installation in the heart of the Scottish capital.

“Over the next few years of returning to Þingeyri, each time to experiment and record with different techniques – stereo, hydrophone, binaural and ambisonic – a means of deeper listening emerged,” says Shaw. “Those early recordings began to inform – and eventually became – the basis of D Ý R A.”

SHHE’s debut album is out now on One Little Independent

FROM "SCRATCH"

Dressing up a dub master

Legendary photographer Dennis Morris took famous portraits of Bob Marley, but arguably his most photogenic subject was another Jamaican maestro. Published this month, 'Super Perry: The Iconic Images Of Lee "Scratch" Perry' captures Morris' long-standing relationship with the producer, and arrives just over a year after Perry's death.

Inside are shots that document the evolution of Perry's unique style beautifully – get ready for some manhole cover-sized medallions and gold crowns that look like they were won in a Christmas cracker.

Yet it's the more candid early career shots that resonate most – of Perry lording over a mixing desk, eyes shut and a mangled mesh of hanging wires – taken inside Black Ark studios, the producer's infamous Kingston facility. You can order a copy now, signed by Morris, for £43.

roughtrade.com

LEVITATION STATION

Win tickets to Castles In Space festival

Weekend away in Whitby, anyone? Fancy seeing The Orb, Warrington-Runcorn New Town Development Plan, Field Lines Cartographer, Jilk and more, all expenses paid? Well, we can't do that last bit (this isn't ITV, you know), but we can manage the rest. We've teamed up with Castles In Space to give one lucky reader the chance to win two free tickets to the label's Levitation '22 festival, which takes place on 4-5 November. With exclusive merch, food and drink, plus ES writer Bob Fischer as MC, it should be quite the event.

For a chance to win, just answer the following question: Who sang vocals on the first Castles In Space release (CiS001)? Send your answers to win@electronicsound.co.uk. The winner will be picked out of a hat and notified on 20 October, and the editor's decision is final. Good luck! **castlesinspace.com**

BREAKING THE BEAT

Documentary charts the rise of jungle

Streaming now on Doc'n Roll TV is 'The Rest Is History: The Early Days Of Drum And Bass', musician and director Peter Costigan's intimate look at the growth of jungle and drum 'n' bass culture. Featuring many of the scene's key protagonists, from Ragga Twins and Jumpin Jack Frost to Optical and Phantasy, the film uses reels of exceptional archive footage and draws on first-hand accounts to take you on a journey through the salad days, illegal raves, record shops and pirate radio stations, which help tell the story of this homegrown music that stood for rebellion and breaking down barriers. Running to 110 minutes, you can stream it now for £7. **docnrollfestival.com**

UNDER THE INFLUENCE

'Mascara Streakz', the first Altered Images album for 39 years, is stuffed with delicious synthpop nuggets. **Clare Grogan** would like to thank her Tom Courtenay-inspired fitness regime, F Scott Fitzgerald and Nancy Pelosi

INTERVIEW: BOB FISCHER

LIFE IN A SCOTTISH SITTING ROOM

"I think where you grow up is really influential. You're either running away from it, or you embrace it! Hanging onto my Glaswegian identity has meant so much to me. I grew up in a household of three generations, and I think a lot about how important it is to have some stability in life, particularly when you do a job like mine. I don't think it has to be a traditional thing – grandparents, mum and dad – I just think it's about the people that care about you remaining in your life.

"When my family had parties, those three generations were always there, and that's stuck with me. I like the idea of everyone being in the room – whoever they are, and however they identify. And I think much of that has come from my upbringing. It wasn't idyllic, but it taught me about keeping your feet on the ground and being good to the people around you."

'THE GREAT GATSBY'

"My dad gave me 'The Great Gatsby' when I was about 14, and I immediately engaged with it – the heartbreak of the disastrous romance between Jay and Daisy, but also the social comment. I probably read it every 10 years, and it's sad that it still seems very relevant. The divisions between the haves and the have-nots, and how extreme they are, particularly now.

"I'm an absolute champagne socialist who has a really nice life, but I also come from a very working-class Glaswegian background, and it's all too much. I don't want to get too political about it, but I hate those divisions."

BORN TO RUN

"I was the girl who hated PE at school. Possibly because we used to wear yellow Crimplene mini-dresses on the hockey field, no matter the weather! But I've always had a lot of nervous energy, and as soon as I left school I started running. I think 'The Loneliness Of The Long Distance Runner' inspired me. A phenomenal film.

"I started at 17, and everyone said, 'She'll never keep this up…', but I have. I run five kilometres, five days a week. It's when I do all my problem-solving. During the pandemic, I decided to revisit all of David Bowie's albums, so I was the crazy lady running down an empty street bellowing out 'Station To Station'! It's my headspace – sometimes it's the only time I have to myself. It's really important to have moments in life when you can just… ignore people! [laughs]."

THIS FEAR OF GODS

"I used to watch Simple Minds in small clubs in Glasgow, and they really spoke to me. At a time when the bands on 'Top Of The Pops' seemed a million miles away from my reality, Simple Minds made me realise that it didn't matter if you came from a housing scheme in Glasgow. You could still be part of it.

"They were incredibly kind to Altered Images when we started out. They would ask us to support them and made us feel part of their wee tribe. I still listen to their 'Empires And Dance' album a lot – I love it. Music is therapy. It just allows you to forget whatever is tricky for you, and that album still does it for me. I could cry just thinking about Simple Minds… [she wipes away genuine tears] sorry, I'm such a weird person, ignore me! But music has saved me so many times."

SHIRLEY MACLAINE

"When I was a wee girl, I saw the film 'Sweet Charity'. And the thing I loved about it was this funny woman, who was supremely talented and maybe not conventionally how you were meant to look as a film star. I instantly thought, 'I want to be Shirley MacLaine!'. I got my hair cut exactly like hers and dyed it red. I once did a photoshoot inspired by 'Sweet Charity', too, wearing a black fringed dress, and dancing on a bar.

"I watch 'The Apartment', the comedy she made with Jack Lemmon, every New Year's Eve. My husband says, 'That's just fucking weird, Clare. It's a film about suicide'. But it's really not! I just love her. She's not afraid of the machine that sucks you in when you have that kind of fame."

NANCY PELOSI

"I became fascinated by Nancy Pelosi during the whole Trump era. Things were in freefall, and she'd probably been up all night working, but she'd be there every day, looking immaculate. She's an incredible politician with an incredible legacy, but she'd always appear in a snappy suit with her hair done.

"She reminds me a little of my mum, whose mantra was, 'No matter how shit things get, you still put on an appearance'. In many ways, that shouldn't apply, but for me putting on my sparkly platforms makes me feel invincible!"

THE KIDS ARE ALRIGHT

"I love this generation of teenagers, they're amazingly resilient. I have a 17-year-old daughter, and I love the fact that they want to save the world. And they're really clear about acceptance of people. I was in a TV series called 'Skins', where I played a naughty mum, and journalists would ask, 'What's it like working with teenagers?'. I'd say, 'I love it! I want to suck their blood!'. I just love their energy, although sometimes persuading my daughter to get out of bed is quite the challenge.

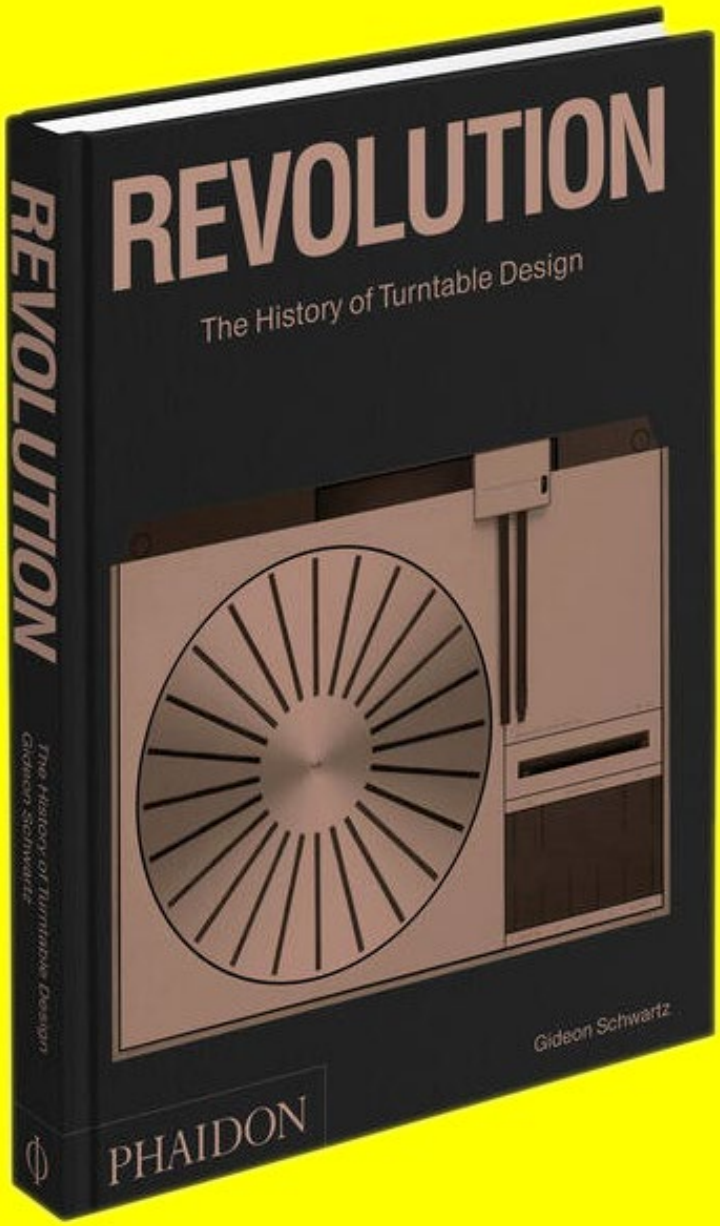
"That's a big theme of the new album – trying to remember the young person I was. Because I think self-doubt has crept into my life. Being in this business for 40 years, it's hard to avoid. But, as a teenager, I wouldn't let anything get in my way. Not because I was ruthlessly ambitious, I just didn't want to see the obstacles. And that's what I love about teenagers, that, 'Why not? Why can't I do that?', attitude. What a great mantra for life."

'Mascara Streakz' is out now on Cooking Vinyl

DECKS APPEAL

All hail the turntable bible

Researched and written by audio expert Gideon Schwartz, 'Revolution: The History Of Turntable Design' is a new book published by Phaidon that explores the design and cultural impact of this timeless piece of technology. A follow-up to his excellent 'Hi-Fi: The History Of High-End Audio Design' tome, Schwartz's turntable guide includes over 300 exquisite illustrations, from "affordable to high-end, and everything in between", including Philips' attempt to woo the post-war youth with colourful, lunchbox-sized machines, to DaVinci Audio Labs' 163kg Reference MK11, which has a mind-boggling four tonearm bases. The book will set you back £74.95, but it's an essential purchase for any analogue fan. **phaidon.com**



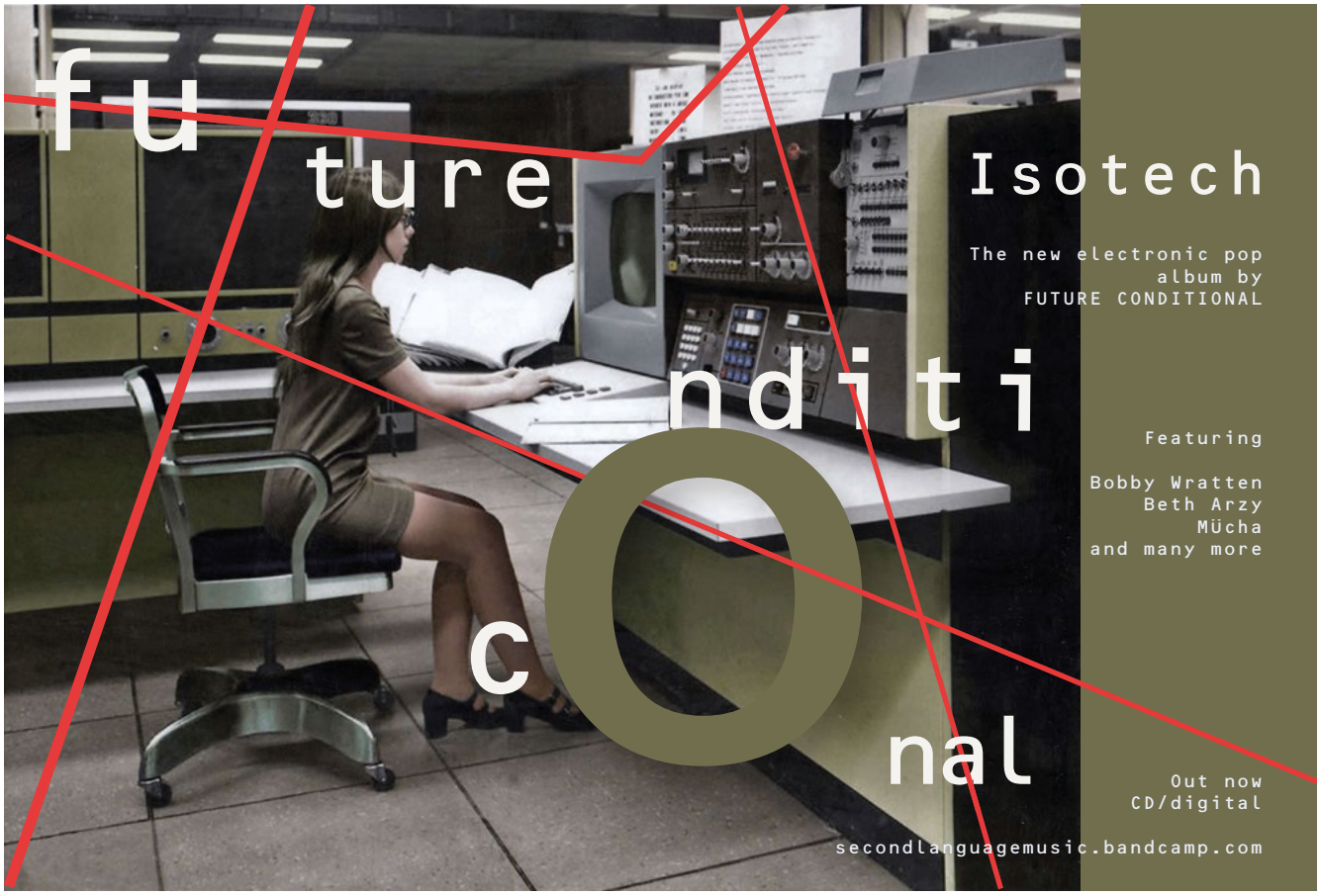
MARK SHREEVE, 1957-2022

UK synth pioneer dies aged 65

We were saddened to hear about the passing of renowned synthesist Mark Shreeve. Born in Great Yarmouth in 1957, Shreeve was among the UK's first wave of DIY/bedroom electronic musicians, releasing his debut album 'Phantom' in 1980 on Bristol's Mirage cassette label.

Shreeve proved to be a prolific artist throughout the 80s, releasing 12 albums of Berlin School-style space music, alongside composing film scores and attaining surprise mainstream success by writing Samantha Fox's 1986 Top 10 hit, 'Touch Me (I Want Your Body)'. In the 90s, Shreeve returned to the Berlin School sound, founding the group Redshift in 1996, before forming a rich partnership with Ian Boddy as ARC in 1998. Together they released 10 studio albums, 2017's 'Fleet' being their most recent.

"He was a longtime friend of over 40 years," says Boddy. "A musical collaborator who really was one of the foundations of the UK electronic music scene that blossomed in the 80s in the wake of the Berlin School." You can listen to many of their releases at **dinrecords.bandcamp.com**



CLOSER TO THE BONE

In his new book, 'Bone Music', **Stephen Coates** resumes his journey into the phenomenon of "X-ray audio" – a compelling tale of people overcoming repression through music

WORDS: DAVID POLLOCK

History shows that people will go to extreme lengths in order to hear new music. But in the repressive and highly punitive society of Stalin's post-Second World War Soviet Russia, some were even willing to risk their lives.

These were the Soviet "bootleggers", who reproduced banned recordings for the population, and engaged in furtive deals out of view of the NKVD, Stalin's brutal secret police. But with no access to commercial recording equipment, a little bit of technological improvisation was required. This is the story of what has now become known as X-ray audio.

"Before the war, machines had been invented in the West which allowed people to make their own records," says 'Bone Music' author Stephen Coates, also the lead singer in The Real Tuesday Weld. "These lathes were used by radio stations and journalists as recording devices in the field, in the era before tape.

"In the Soviet Union after the war, people copied the machines, and in a cultural situation where a huge amount of popular music was forbidden, young people – young men, mostly – in Leningrad [modern-day Saint Petersburg] in 1946 started to make records of this forbidden music for themselves, because they were music lovers. Then increasingly they made them available for sale and distribution."

Yet with no access to "blanks" – unpressed discs of vinyl used for recording onto – they were forced to use their imagination.

"These bootleggers found they could record on used X-ray film," explains Coates. "It was in plentiful supply if you struck elicit deals after-hours with people who worked in the hospitals."

Coates uses the term "bone music" to refer to these pressings, partly because each record bore the dramatic imprint of whoever's body had been X-rayed onto them.

"It's a bit much to call it 'Soviet soul music', since that gives the wrong impression of what it sounds like," continues Coates. "But it really was the music of the Russian people, and something written deep into the bone."

Coates has long been fascinated by the technical and cultural history of this phenomenon. In 2015, his first book on the subject, 'X-Ray Audio: The Strange Story Of Soviet Music On The Bone', was published by Strange Attractor, and this month we get the follow-up, 'Bone Music'. This second book digs deeper into the history of the movement, into the types of music played and the surrounding cultural context. Remarkably, Coates thinks he's now traced the origins of using X-ray film to make records back to a Hungarian bootlegger who was active prior to the Second World War.

"The people in power in the Soviet Union were very aware of the power of culture, so they sought to use it and restrict it for ideological reasons," explains Coates. Literature was censored, and increasingly so was music – genres like jazz and all the music made by Russian emigres who left after the Revolution and sought refuge in the West. Gypsy tango styles became forbidden, because the rhythms were regarded as being 'unhelpful' for young people, arousing the wrong kind of passions.

"Then within the country there is and still remains a style of music called 'Blatnaya', which translates as 'criminal songs'… Gulag songs, Odessa songs. They are Russian folk songs, but earthy, often rude and very funny. Songs about real life in the Soviet Union, about suffering and fighting, sung between people in the trenches, the Gulags, the courtyards, the kitchens. All forbidden, with no outlet. That's the cultural context."

In many ways, these recordings were mirroring what was happening in the West – the emergence of the teenager was becoming a cultural identity in its own right, creating generational divides. Except in Soviet Russia, you wouldn't just get a slap on the wrist. Creating or owning bootlegged records could result in violence or imprisonment.

The only official records of the time are strongly scathing of these "criminals", and so in order to piece the story together, Coates had to go directly to the people who were involved for testimony. They're all elderly now – four of the major contributors to his new book have died in the six years since he started writing it.

In 1964, X-ray audio culture more or less vanished after Khrushchev permitted households to own reel-to-reel tape recorders. Some in the Communist Party naively hoped citizens might record officially sanctioned music or political speeches. In fact, the proliferation of tape recorders led to an explosion of illicit recordings. Now Coates tells the history in his books and through a touring exhibition where he cuts an X-ray record using a lathe, live onstage.

"Anyone under about 30 marvels at the process", he chuckles. So far, Coates has recorded the music of Radiohead and Massive Attack. He also plays real X-ray records produced in the Soviet Union. What do they sound like now?

"Some X-rays sound pretty scratchy, some of them sound appalling and some of them still sound amazing, which was down to the quality of the original recording and the skill of the operator. One of our interviewees told me about first hearing these after perestroika on official records, in their full, unadulterated, hi-fi glory, and he didn't recognise them. He'd gotten attached to the way they sounded on X-rays, and now they weren't quite the same."

'Bone Music' is published by Strange Attractor and is now available for pre-order

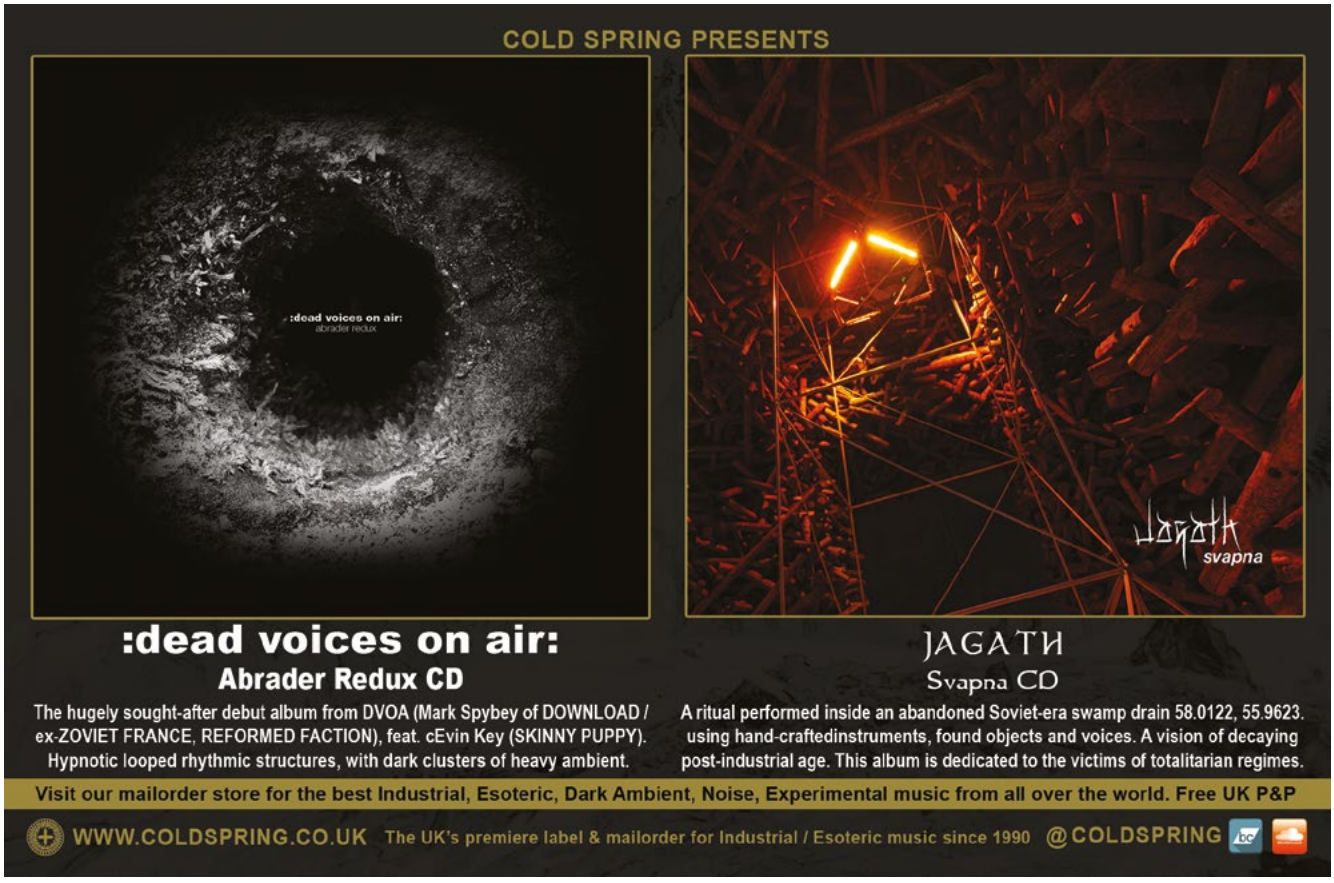
KNOCK ON WOOD

Synth cabinets made from the oldest wood on Earth

When Erik Needham, founder of luxurious Bay Area synth cabinet workshop Needham Woodworks, appeared on the modular-obsessed Podular Modcast podcast, one listener named Ryan came away so inspired that he felt compelled to send Erik a gift.

A few weeks later, Erik received a piece of 50,000-year-old kauri wood – the oldest non-petrified wood in the world – with an invitation from Ryan to make a beautiful, one-of-a-kind piece using it. No pressure, Erik.

"I'm honestly terrified to use it in fear of not doing it justice or, even worse, doing damage to it!" says Erik. "While getting better at woodworking, one makes less mistakes and learns to better-hide any mistakes made, but it would be a travesty to ruin this piece of history frozen in time. I'll most likely slice it into thin veneers at the bandsaw, allowing me to use it more than once, spreading its unique beauty to numerous builds, and giving me more than one chance to give it new life as something beautiful." Presumably you're just as excited as we are to see the results, so make sure you follow the company's socials to keep tabs on their progress. **needhamwoodworks.com**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ALL TOGETHER NOW

From the Strega – **Make Noise**'s new desktop synth – comes 'Strega Musica', a compilation album featuring noted electronicists including **Alessandro Cortini** from Nine Inch Nails, who is also one of its curators

WORDS: WILLIAM STOKES

Founded by the former Moog employee Tony Rolando, Make Noise's relatively short 14-year existence in the synth developer world has been long enough for them to make a considerable impact on the electronic music landscape.

The company's innovations, which already furnish a litany of live set-ups and the studios of lauded artists, such as Richard D James and Thom Yorke, feature visually striking designs and a boundary-pushing approach to various schools of synthesis and sound practice.

While Make Noise deal mainly in modules, a trio of formidable, self-contained electronic instruments has helped bring its distinctive approach to an even wider demographic of users, providing a gateway for many into the enveloping world of modular synthesis with their Eurorack-compatible systems.

The latest of these is the Strega – a compact yet powerful noise and melody-making machine, boasting onboard effects, conductive touch surfaces and an interface that looks like it was birthed by an alien race.

It pushes the maxim preached by Make Noise's PR department – "We see our instruments as a collaboration with musicians" – into fresh territory, as it has been co-designed by venerable synthesist and Nine Inch Nails mainstay, Alessandro Cortini, whose own musical approach served as inspiration. High praise.

"I'm not a designer," confesses Cortini, speaking on the eve of NIN's tour-opening show at the Red Rocks Amphitheatre in Colorado. "But overall, designing the Strega was very similar to writing music with a band. That's how I see it, you know? Tony is a great friend. Kelly [Kelbel, Make Noise co-founder] is a great friend. The Strega seems to have resonated with people, but the whole thing wasn't born by sitting down at the table and trying to come up with something that people would like. It was about coming up with something that excited us without going bankrupt!"

PHOTO: EMILIE ELIZABETH

From its imaginative visual layout to its tactile feel, the Strega is a reflection of Cortini's intuition-driven approach to music-making.

"To this day, I can't play a C chord on a chromatic keyboard," he laughs. "I mean, I can figure it out. But from day one, a touch plate represented freedom to me. I could tune that note or that value to wherever I want it to be.

"I also really wanted it to be a standalone thing as opposed to a Eurorack thing, because I really believe in the sectorial approach of music-making, where you try to have a discourse, a dialogue, with the instrument in front of you."

It's that very dialogue that has led to a string of artist collaborations from Make Noise. 'Strega Musica' is a mouthwatering collection of 13 tracks by a high-profile line-up of musicians, including Daniel Miller, Caterina Barbieri, Ben Frost, Robert Aiki Aubrey Low, Kali Malone, Julianna Barwick and many more, created exclusively on the Strega, with each interpreting it in their own distinctive way. Available to download free via Make Noise's Bandcamp page, the album is a demonstration of the Strega's power to facilitate a plethora of creative expressions, given each musician's limited prior experience of it.

The exceptions to this rule, of course, are Rolando and Cortini, who both feature on the album but had exhaustively trialled various iterations of the Strega ahead of its final design. They each contribute a track, and their collaborative piece 'Stregata' concludes the compilation.

"We kind of wanted to be the bookend, in a way," says Cortini. "And also do our own things alone. It was great. I really had a good time working with Tony on it."

As Cortini explains, it was a gratifying experience to witness how the artists on the album make use of the Strega in ways that he could never have foreseen.

"It's great to see them integrating it into their own workflow," he says. "I mean, Julianna [Barwick] is a perfect example of that, in the sense that a good chunk of her creative output is based on her voice. That's not by any means to limit what she does, but to see the Strega integrated into that process is really fascinating.

"I think the collection of artists is, in my opinion, remarkable. It's some of the people who I feel represent where the interesting music is these days."

'Strega Musica' is out now on Make Noise Music

Tone Science

Tone Science Live
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NEEDS MUST

Freewheeling through time and space, **Kris Needs** continues his adventures in sound. This month: Andrew Weatherall's dancefloor destruction in Bucks

You all know by now that I'm writing a book with Nina Walsh about her life with Andrew Weatherall. As the opus rears into life like a sleeping giraffe's stiffy, I'm still in the Weatherall orbit so, inevitably, I've been digging out tunes Nina's mentioned or that I remember from his incendiary DJ sets.

There was a magical stretch in the early 1990s when I was writing the original Needs Must as a reviews section for Black Echoes. Every week, my ever-swelling column would be bursting with hot 12-inch singles pouring in from Europe and America, the cream spurting into Fat Cat Records in Covent Garden on Friday afternoons and spawning my Greatest Trousers Top 20. Andrew was often first in line to snarf up killers for his weekend's engagements. He relished seeing how much havoc he could wreak with that week's new arrivals, deploying his impossibly inimitable style to cause maximum destruction.

Friday nights back then could see him strafe the bonkers Casbah Club in Chesham, run by acid house veterans half an hour from my Aylesbury base. When I was signed to Andrew and Nina's Sabres Of Paradise label, this funky madhouse was where I heard him play my debut Secret Knowledge release, 'Sugar Daddy', for the first time.

That particular ditty started innocently enough with a placid oriental shower motif, nudged from below by a gathering pulse throbbing in the cerebral Y-fronts. After a distorted techno-Ramones "Wunn-too-free", all hell breaks loose as marching snares manifest, steadily intensifying in volume until there's total carnage on the dancefloor. Then, the coruscating barrage fades into glistening synths, conjuring memories of playing xylophone on a space zebra's testicles before a ham-slapping breakbeat kicks in. When the snares thunder back, it's all over. Psychotic snare onslaughts were now branded into the dancefloor destruction manual for further use.

Another Greatest Trouser chart-topper, released on R&S sub-imprint Global Cuts (started by Belgian producer Sven Van Hees of 'Emotional Rehabilitation' fame), '20 Hz' by Capricorn made a monolithic start for the label and launched the career of Amsterdam producer Hans Weekhout. An obvious homage to Jam & Spoon, who'd recently struck with 'Stella', this was a classic example of how Dutch techno at that time could seduce or slaughter in the space of one track – unless in the teasing hands of Mr Weatherall, of course.

Coming full circle, our book will be called 'PUNKADELICA! Nina Walsh's Shape-Shifting Journeys Through Life And Music With Andrew Weatherall And Beyond'. "Wunn-too-free…"

SUSSEX SOUND

South coast indie festival returns

Sonics returns to Hastings this month (21-23 October), for a festival in celebration of "experimental, electronic and underground culture". With no half measures, either, as legendary Detroit electronicists Dopplereffekt (whose main member, Gerald Donald, formed one half of techno icons Drexciya) take to the stage on Friday to present their new live AV show alongside Maria Mendes, while rave stalwart Ceephax Acid Crew will be closing on Saturday. Weekend tickets are £35, but loads of daytime events are free, with a full schedule of "experimental turntablism, cutting-edge electronica, post-punk, jazz, improvised explorations, bass music and noise, workshops, art, talks, films, installations and more," say the organisers. It's one you won't want to miss.
instagram.com/sonics_hastings

ON THE RECORD

A Kraftwerkian speaks...

An important date for your diary, as Karl Bartos will be speaking in Manchester on Saturday 12 November at the Louder Than Words Festival. He will be discussing his wonderful autobiography, 'The Sound Of The Machine', which was published for the first time in English in July. Expect to hear more about his intriguing path into music via a three-year apprenticeship with a telephone company, how The Beatles changed his perspective on pop, and much juicy goss from behind the Kling Klang curtain. Tickets for the talk cost just £7.59.

In fact, why not prep yourself by reading Mark Roland's interview with Bartos from Issue 91, which is now available to read on our website. While you're there, you can also order a copy of Bartos' book in hardback form.
louderthanwordsfest.com

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PULSE

PARK MOTIVE

Star-in-waiting ruffles electronic feathers

WHO?

Park Motive are a new Bristol six-piece led by wunderkind, Sam Herschmann – a 22-year-old cynosure with a keen sense of musical adventure, and a gift for spinning poetic yarns that delve into sci-fi and the supernatural.

WHY PARK MOTIVE?

Their debut EP, the remarkably assured 'Duuust', feels more like a collection of short stories than a record, with four phantasmagoric tracks taking us on truly unexpected journeys. 'Undark' opens as a spoken-word cut and concludes with Herschmann yelping like David Byrne over a backbeat, bemoaning the effects of being accidentally stabbed with a piece of Polonium-210. Yikes. And then there's 'Phantom', a song about living in rented accommodation with a spook who's trying to communicate something, the tenant all the while buying sundry houseplants to cover up a rancid smell that can't be located. Elsewhere, 'Incident' unfurls over a broken beat and some woodblock, all played in a weird time signature, which makes it great to listen to, but problematic if you want to dance – which you do. And 'Oval Frame' – a song as beautiful and unsullied as Röyksopp's 'Poor Leno', though what is it actually about? Your guess is as good as mine (don't say an oval frame).

TELL US MORE...

As a teenager, Herschmann played in the Kilburn guitar group Shoot-Up Hill, named after a nearby Hampstead street (the Romans named it, so it probably has nothing to do with hard drugs or guns). Young Sam was recording electronic demos that didn't make sense for the indie rock band to play, so he started developing these strange songs, influenced by his love of electronica and jazz fusion, and they became stranger and stranger as they grew, eventually finding a home under the banner Park Motive. No doubt you'll be hearing more from this talented and inscrutable lot.

JEREMY ALLEN

'Duuust' is out now on Spinny Nights

CHEAT CODE

Podcast offers essential music industry tips

'Not A Diving Podcast' is the work of British producer Paul Rose, aka Scuba, who says it aims to provide "an insight into the psychology of artists and what motivates them to create, while diving into all the juicy topics of the day". Airing weekly, he's already tallied up an all-star line-up of guests, including A Guy Called Gerald, Plastician and MJ Cole, along with a number of industry gurus, like Aphex Twin's agent, Ned Beckett, and Rich McGinnis, who helped set up and run Manchester's Warehouse Project. It's all free too, so dive straight in. **not-diving.captivate.fm/listen**

THREE NIGHTS IN TURIN

...attending a stellar electronic festival

Taking place in the Italian city of Turin next month is C2C, a festival with such a mind-melting line-up you might have to shake yourself. With a strong experimental edge provided by the likes of Autechre, ARCA and Caterina Barbieri, Caribou and Jamie xx locking down the dancefloor, plus newcomers Jockstrap and modular harpist Nala Sinephro (not to be missed!), this year's event is celebrating 20 years of C2C, which explains why they've gone so big. With many more names worth checking out, you can order a weekend ticket for as little as €75. Get yours now. **clubtoclub.it**

SPECIAL O)))FFER

Drone specialists flog gear rarities online

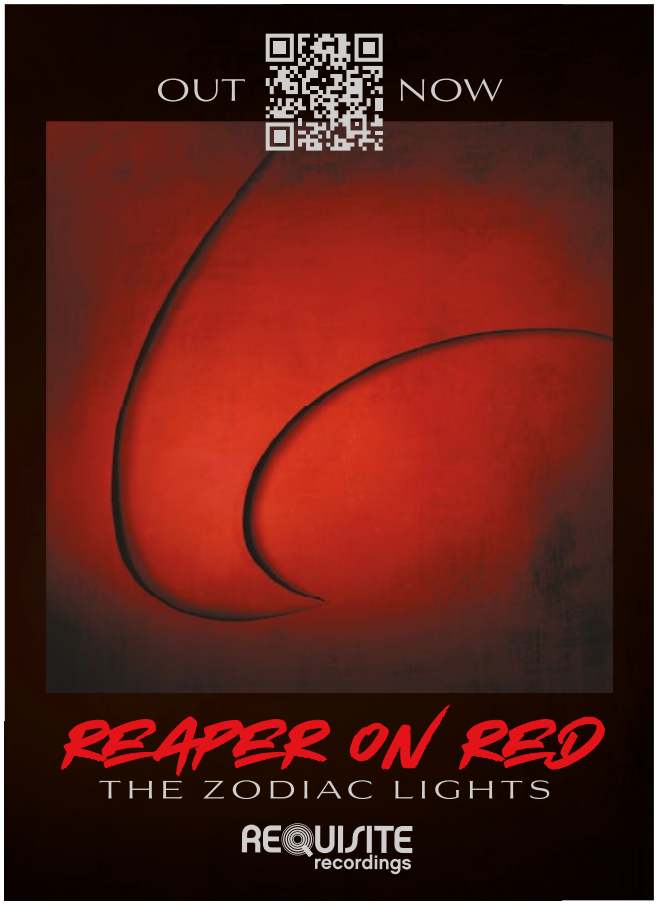
Sunn O))), kings of constructing deafening walls of sound, have gone a step further than simply sharing taster shots of their gear – last month, they opened a new online store to auction off some rarities from their vast collection. With a selection of pedals – including the renowned Russian Big Muff – amps and the odd bit of vinyl thrown in for good measure, the official Sunn O))) Reverb Shop offers a veritable feast for the eyes. Credit card at the ready… on your marks, get set, O))). **reverb.com**

KIDS' STUFF

The synth-based graphic novel you need

Tomas Z Westberg has been an active member of the Swedish electronic scene since the late 1980s, producing doomy industrial synth music under the aliases Svaj. and Syntet. But his latest project, 'Synth Kids', is a semi-autobiographical graphic novel set in 1985, which tells the coming-of-age story of a 13-year-old boy who gets hooked on the new electronic music playing on the radio to become "a true synth kid". It paints an accurate and heartfelt portrait of a subculture through 50 comic strips and Westberg's own photos. More than 200 songs, artists and albums are mentioned, from Kraftwerk to Front 242 and Nitzer Ebb, with a complete playlist included. We strongly advise you order a copy now for £28. **synth-kids.com**

AND SO...
HM... REAL HARDCORE SYNTH-KIDS SHAVE THEIR SIDES...
THEY SEEM TO LIVE IN PANAVISION
DAD HAS AN ELECTRIC SHAVER...
ON A TV SCREEN
BZZZ
OR IN A NON-STOP DREAM
SO FUCKING COOL!!
MAKES THE HAIR ON TOP LOOK LONGER!
BUT IT WON'T STICK UP!
SHOULD WE TRY SUGAR WATER?
WHAT'S WRONG?
OKAY!



PULSE

QUASI QUI

Stylish synthpoppers bring the heat

WHO?

Quasi Qui are brother and sister Yehan and Zadi Jehan, who make futuristic, immersive synthpop with apocalyptic lyrical twists. Together, they've released a handful of singles, but Yehan has been lauded as a composer and producer in his own right for a number of years, beginning with chart-ready indie pop debut 'Expansions' in 2017.

WHY QUASI QUI?

Operating in a "dystopian yet utopian sci-fi reality", their music has the enticing quality of being surreal and yet somehow comforting. Seductive, yet homely. This enigmatic sound, one imagines, is due to the duo's varied cultural experiences – their Bosnian parents' love of classical music, as well as 1980s funk and soul – and wide-ranging influences. Yehan says his favourite artists include Björk and William Orbit, while Zadi is a fan of Sade, Frank Ocean and Blood Orange. The pair are currently based in Paris, having recently signed to French indie label microqlima, but their collective name is Italian. Translating as "almost here", it's perhaps a nod to the way their music seems to slip through the fingers, charmingly difficult to pin down with its dreamy, evanescent vocals, swirling synthesisers and nonchalant grooves.

TELL US MORE...

Quasi Qui's debut album, 'Downloading A New Operating System', showcases more of the duo's penchant for interlacing their own assemblage of influences with effortless hooks and Yehan's trademark production. Lead single 'Directorial Debut' is a paean to mental frustration with lyrics that pull no punches ("I want to scream / I want to tear a hole in my lung"). The song's dreamlike video, which shows Yehan and Zadi running through fields being chased by a large white ball, is surely an extension of the unwavering dedication to phantasmagoria and escapism, evident throughout Quasi Qui's music.

IMOGEN BEBB

'Downloading A New Operating System' is released by microqlima on 4 November

ROXSTARS

The history of Roxy Music, written by a fan

Roxy Music's eponymous debut album was released 50 years ago – wince! – and to mark that milestone, writer and mega-fan Jocelyn Fiske has served up a real treat. 'Roxy Live: Under Exposed, One Fan's Unseen Concert Photos' is made up of rare images and memorabilia, with charming anecdotes dotted throughout, together telling a marvellous history of the group that begins with their heyday in 1973 and goes right up to their final live performance in 2019. Sadly, the version signed by the band has now sold out, but you can still order the standard edition for £39.99. And, by the way, Fiske really is deserving of "mega-fan" status, having seen Roxy Music play an estimated 350 times. Wow. **titanbooks.com**

LIVING IN THE EIGHTIES

Charting a decade in sight and sound

Another book about the 1980s?? If you thought this particular decade had been endlessly picked over by culture vultures, hold your horses. '80s Sound And Vision' draws on the archive of American photographer Sheila Rock (who was based in London at the time) to bring you previously unseen photos of the decade's many stars (Bowie, Ferry, et al), subcultures (new romantics, goths), plus the essential hangouts of the day (Blitz, Le Beat Route). All in all, this lavish visual account might not bring any revelatory analysis, but by golly does it make this important era look good. That's £32 well spent. **quarto.com**

TIME MACHINE

A muggy night at London's Kilburn National Ballroom in September 1987, and German industrial-meisters **Einstürzende Neubauten** are headlining. The support act? 1970s glam rock entertainers **Showaddywaddy**. As one press report aptly put it, "Say WADD?"

WORDS: JO KENDALL
PICTURES: RICHARD BELLIA

It was a source of bafflement and astonishment, and some who were present still can't quite comprehend what happened. But happen it did…

On 7 September 1987, industrial experimentalists Einstürzende Neubauten played their sole UK date of the year at London's Kilburn National Ballroom, promoting their fourth album, 'Fünf Auf Der Nach Oben Offenen Richterskala'. Their support act? Seventies Ted-rockers Showaddywaddy.

Four years earlier, EN had made their UK and London live debut on a thrilling bill with The Birthday Party and Malaria!. Signed by noted disruptor Stevo to his Some Bizzare label – home to Soft Cell, The The and Cabaret Voltaire – EN followed up their avant-punk first record 'Kollaps' (1981) with the more evolved 'Zeichnungen Des Patienten OT/Drawings Of OT' and 'Halber Mensch' albums (1983 and 1985 respectively) and performed with acts such as goth band, The March Violets, and Boyd Rice's noise duo, NON.

EN's improv-screamed, construction-site Sturm und Drang developed elements of blackened ambient and electronic dance music, and they took jackhammers and drills onstage, as well as guitars and an experimental drum set-up. They'd performed at the ICA with a cement mixer in tow for 'Concerto For Voice & Machinery'. An audience riot ensued after the band tried to tunnel through the floor wielding petrol chainsaws, choking said crowd with fumes and spraying them with shattered glass. Einstürzende Neubauten –fittingly, 'Collapsing New Buildings' – were a wild, inventive, speed-fuelled gang of Teutonic sonic nihilists. So how did they come to be paired with Leicester's crepes-and-drapes hitmakers?

"We were working with Derek Block Associates, trying to relaunch," says Showaddywaddy frontman Dave Bartram. "We were going a bit tougher and leaving the glammy, teenage side behind. Our agent Mike told us this guy Stevo had been in touch, offering a gig with Einstürzende Neubauten, and I thought, 'Stevo's trying to have a bit of a laugh here. He thinks he's throwing Showaddywaddy to the lions'.

Bartram had no hesitation, though.

"We were an adept live band, and I knew all the rock magazines would be there, so we decided to do it."

"The bill was Stevo's idea," recalls ex-EN bassist, Mark Chung. "We'd never heard of Showaddywaddy, and we were in our own world, so we were like, 'Oh, crazy Stevo, what's he done now?' [laughs]."

Showaddywaddy were platinum-selling 'Top Of The Pops' regulars, slick entertainers with colourful costumes and choreographed routines. They turned up for the EN show with a scaled-down four-man crew and set about soundchecking.

"We were treated like shit when we arrived," recalls Bartram. "The crew just looked down their noses at us."

But by stage-time, the venue was packed and Showaddywaddy had the bit between their teeth.

"We ran out onstage to a sea of black," continues Bartram. "It was a gothic audience, pallid faces, big hair, piercings. We felt a rush of adrenaline and, for 45 minutes, upped our game."

Jack Barron from NME found the performance cheesy, saying the group had come from "panto-land" and were little more than "toilet cleaners in rock 'n' roll's hall of infamy". Melody Maker's The Stud Brothers remarked that the presumed joke billing was only "faintly amusing" and perhaps even insulting to the audience. French photographer Richard Bellia, who shot the gig for the Maker, has had his Showaddywaddy images from that night filed under Chumbawamba for the past 35 years.

"I'd never heard of Showaddywaddy before," he muses. "I just knew it was another stupid name."

EN fan Louise Wellenkamp, however, remembers it differently.

"I arrived at the venue and saw who the support was," she says. "I then tried to explain to my friend David why it was Showaddywaddy, and failed. But then, what a rip-roaring set they did – and how all those pseuds got their 70s on, and seemed to really enjoy it!"

Chung was the only EN member to show interest.

"I was curious, so I popped up from backstage and had a look. I thought it was quite entertaining. As a concert-goer, I prefer the bands on a bill to be different – Stevo took that to an extreme [laughs]."

Some attendees arrived after Showaddywaddy's slot, but picked up on a vibe as EN hit the stage. Journalist Chris Bohn bumped into former EN tour manager Jessamy Calkin, who said the band were a bit cross about the bill.

"There was a bit of a buzz and ill temper going down in their set, I felt," says Bohn. "But that's what Neubauten did anyway – making a bracing, physical kind of music. It was a highly exhilarating show."

But he was also hearing that Showaddywaddy had "turned the situation on its head a bit" and that "some fans were won over".

Graeme Bent from Sounds was impressed. He called Showaddywaddy "a difficult act to follow", writing that EN were "sorely disappointing".

At the front of the stage, rather than focusing on spidery frontman Blixa Bargeld, Richard Bellia instead found his attention being drawn to drummer FM Einheit.

"It was exciting that he was scraping metal with a power drill and some sort of engine that he'd built," says Bent. "It didn't feel rock 'n' roll at all. It was like a demonstration of power."

In the crowd, writer Marcello Carlin commented that Showaddywaddy had been "more up for it" than Neubauten, and that he'd seen "co-drummer Romeo Challenger at the side of the stage, keenly observing Neubauten's percussive doings".

Bartram, meanwhile, stood at the back of the hall.

"As their set wore on, the crowd response was a bit on the low side," he remembers. "At that point, I felt that we'd risen to the challenge and it had worked."

Proof of that came with the headline of the live review in Melody Maker: "England 3, Germany 1". Here, The Stud Brothers asserted that, "If Blixa and the disorganisers had hoped Showaddywaddy would be blitzed offstage, they were sorely mistaken".

For Bartram, it's the weirdest gig he ever played.

"But I think we gained a new-found respect from certain quarters," he claims. "And then, many years later, that performance got into Time Out's '100 Greatest Live London Gigs'!"

So what was Stevo thinking when planning the event?

"It's just yin and yang, innit?" he says. "I liked the idea of rock 'n' roll beside anti-rock 'n' roll. The media promoted the idea that there was going to be anarchy. But Showaddywaddy were bigger than Neubauten, and the fans thoroughly enjoyed it. They were doing that 1970s Mud dance in Dr Martens, with mohicans and anarchy symbols."

Looking back, with such a mixed reception, does he consider the gig was a success?

"Well," says Stevo, "we're still talking about it today, aren't we?"

SOS

The British Library's Save Our Sounds project aims to save UK recordings from extinction. This month, **Andy Linehan**, Curator of Popular Music, remembers former British Library colleague **Ian Rawes** and his website, The London Sound Survey

Ian Rawes was a sound recordist, archivist and documenter of everyday life who sadly died suddenly in October 2021. He was the founder of London Sound Survey, a widely praised website featuring field recordings of the noises of London, old and new, and articles on the theme of urban sound.

Born in 1965 and brought up in West London, in the early 1980s Rawes became involved with the anarcho-punk scene in the capital, publishing the fanzine Pigs For Slaughter. He later moved to Scotland, where he managed the Barrowlands venue and opened his own club, booking bands including My Bloody Valentine and The Jesus And Mary Chain.

He returned to London in the mid-1990s, and in 2001 he joined the British Library as a vault keeper (a title he found both amusing and slightly archaic) in the Sound Archive. His job was to store and retrieve recordings on all sorts of formats that were collected by curators or requested by the public. He was fascinated by the variety of material he dealt with, particularly environmental and mechanical sounds that the casual listener might dismiss as banal.

These inspired him to create a website, London Sound Survey, with the aim of documenting the everyday sounds of London before they disappeared. He set about making his own recordings, often using a pair of head-worn binaural microphones which enabled him to work unobtrusively in urban environments. Titles on the website such as 'Christian Street Preacher', 'Kingston Bypass Subway' and 'Winding St Anne's Clock Soho' give a flavour of the content.

In 2013, a number of his recordings – including the strikingly-named 'Cigarette Ponce' – were issued on vinyl on the Vittelli label under the title 'These Are The Good Times', and in 2014 Ian left the British Library to concentrate on his audio interests, expanding London Sound Survey to more than 2,000 items. In 2016, he published a book of "forgotten sound-words" called 'Honk, Conk And Squacket'.

Further London Sound Survey recordings were issued on the 2019 album 'Thames', on the Persistence Of Sound label. These feature a mix of industrial and environmental recordings, from the inner workings of Tower Bridge to the sounds of the Essex shore. The label is also releasing a posthumous compilation, 'From Dusk Till Dawn', which is an aural journey through the dark in East Anglia.

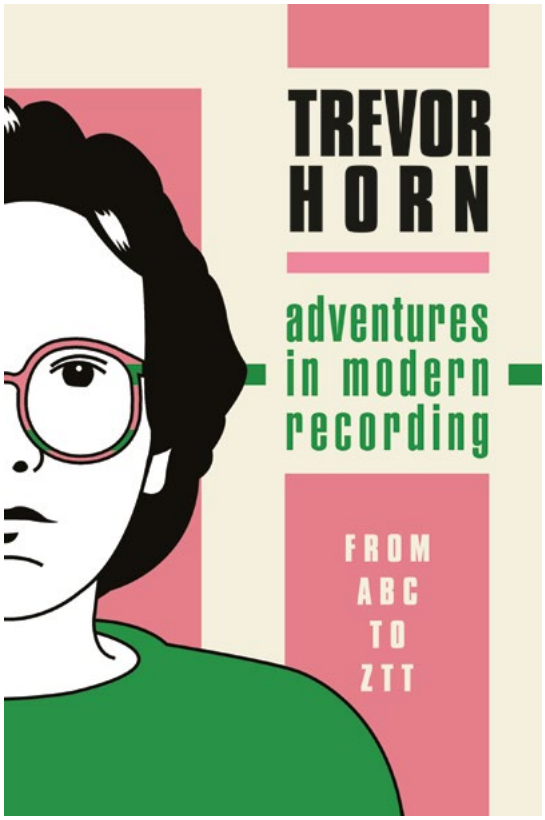
Ian's work became more widely known and appreciated as it progressed, and he made a number of media appearances describing the importance of the sounds of everyday life. He remained modest, down-to-earth and unpretentious about what he was doing, maintaining his sociable nature and healthy sense of humour.

The London Sound Survey collection is permanently stored at the London Metropolitan Archives. For more, see search.lma.gov.uk

SOUND THE HORN

The definitive memoir of a studio legend

Trevor Horn is the production titan once described as "the man who invented the 80s". Indeed, he belongs to that tiny club of producers who are arguably as well-known as the artists they twiddled knobs for, and this month, his much-anticipated memoir is finally being released. 'Adventures In Modern Recording: From ABC To ZTT' is Horn's story told in his own words, written through the prism of 23 of his most iconic songs, each of which helped shape the lush melodic bombast of the era. It's a brilliant approach to personal writing, which includes tracks from Simple Minds, Paul McCartney and The Buggles, and big hits like 'Relax', 'Poison Arrow' and 'Crazy'. Bag a hardback copy now for £22. You won't regret it. **roughtrade.com**



TECHNO NIGHTS

Chronicling the history of Berlin's Tresor

Established in the basement of an old department store in March 1991, Tresor helped turn Berlin into the techno capital of the world. Now this venerable institution, which also spawned a famous label that has released music by scene luminaries including Joey Beltram, Jeff Mills and Robert Hood, is being celebrated in sumptuous book form, making it "the first printed excavation of Tresor's history". More than 400 never-before-seen photographs, flyers, faxes and other artefacts have been compiled into the 352-page chronicle, with the first-hand reminiscences of those who were there painting a colourful picture of an era that begins with the heady days of West Berlin in the late 1980s. All yours for £39.99. **tresorberlin.com**

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PULSE

KELLER MACHINE

The electropogo revolution starts here

WHO?

Sam Day and Adam Donovan, two dog-eared likely lads, one from London and one from Lincolnshire. Having spent the last couple of years putting single tracks on Bandcamp, the pair have now brought together the best of these for their debut album, 'Kitchen Sinks And Rocket Ships'. Taking their name from a mind-mushing device used by The Master in a 1971 episode of 'Doctor Who' – this was in the glory days of Jon Pertwee – Keller Machine deliver short and sharp electronic pop songs powered by almost punk levels of vim. Is there such a thing as electropogo? There is now.

WHY KELLER MACHINE?

We could talk about the gritty vocals, or the super-catchy synth melodies, or the driving basslines, but what's most striking about Keller Machine is how they sound like they're having a total blast. They have a way with words as well, the title of their album neatly encapsulating their interest in both humdrum happenings and outer space. Take the opening lines of 'Neil Armstrong', a desperate and hilarious message to the dead astronaut about how badly the future has gone wrong: "Sitting in an egg-shaped chair / Listening to Eno / Accumulating some orgone / Reading The Beano". Rhyming Eno with The Beano is gold star stuff, but sliding a Hawkwind reference in there too is genius.

TELL US MORE...

Since you've asked nicely... Weirdo disco, black briefcases, monsters, Our Price, paper hats, leaky taps and phone taps, Spizz Energi, double chasers, low-end fuzz, David Essex and Ringo Starr, mini-skirts, builder's tea, 'The Man-Machine', bursts of guitar deliberately timed to give synth purists the heebie-jeebies... And relaaaaaax, albeit only for as long as it takes to start wondering why we're messing about with half a page on Keller Machine when they should quite clearly be on the cover of the magazine. Maybe next month.

PUSH

'Kitchen Sinks And Rocket Ships' is out now via Bandcamp

SCHOOL OF ELECTRONIC MUSIC

Resident archivist **Jack Dangers** rattles along with **'Cable Car Soundscapes'**, a unique mix of field recording, performance and musique concrète in celebration of San Francisco's famous transport system

'Cable Car Soundscapes' is one of my favourite field recording albums. It features recordings of cable cars in San Francisco and the people who worked on them. It came out in 1982 on a label called Valiant Productions, although the better-known version was released the following year by Folkways.

The sleeve notes describe the cable car as a "sonic artifact, a living sound relic…" and detail the system's extinction, with a shutdown planned for September 1982.

"The sounds of a cable car are awesome, even mythical, and without a myth a city dies," they claim.

Perhaps the album was part of a cultural campaign to keep the network. If so, then it was successful as they're still going strong today. The machines in the main barn are huge. One mechanism powers the whole web of cables, which run all over the city. You can go into the middle of the road and see the cable turning – it moves constantly underground. You hear it continually. The cars latch on and they get dragged along.

A brilliant piece of musique concrète that uses the sounds of the system, called 'Mettle Of Metal', takes up much of side two. It's pretty late for musique concrète techniques, they weren't coming up so much in the 1980s, but there's just something about it I adore.

'Cable Car Soundscapes' also documents the annual bell-ringing competition between cable car crews on tracks 'Voices' and 'Bellringing'. I live in San Francisco, and it's a very big deal here – we see the bell-ringing on the news every year. They do it in Market Street by the big traverser, or turntable, where they turn the cars around. They're these incredibly intricate performances – things that you can't imagine are possible, with triplets and syncopated rhythms all coming out of a single bell.

It's a very interesting record, but it isn't a particularly rare one, and copies of the original pressing can be picked up pretty cheaply at the moment. The Folkways version tends to be more expensive, but decent copies seem to go for around £20 - £30.

LANDMARKS

Maximum Joy's Janine Rainforth recalls the making of the Bristol post-punk band's 1981 debut **'Stretch'**, a dub-inspired single which became a surprise hit on the dancefloors of NYC

INTERVIEW: ANTON SPICE

"I remember going to my first punk gig. It was Television, Blondie and The Cortinas. I was about 15, and it was like a lightbulb moment. I had been singing and performing already, but when I went to that gig, I just had this very strong feeling of, 'Yes, I can do this too'.

"There was a big scene in Bristol – or at least for us it was a big scene – with a lot of chopping and changing between bands. I met Tony Wrafter, who became the sax player of Maximum Joy, when he was coming out of Glaxo Babies. We both had that similar drive, so we formed Maximum Joy and recruited Charlie Llewellin and Dan Catsis – ex-players from Glaxo Babies – and the guitarist from The Pop Group, John Waddington.

"As teenagers going into young adulthood, everything was centred around a couple of clubs. One of them was The Dugout, which played a huge range of great music, predominantly funk and soul and then later hip hop and disco. We used to listen to disco a lot, and I think that surprises some people. I wasn't aware of being called post-punk then, and I don't really know what a post-punk band is. I mean, we liked mainstream disco – Chic, Odyssey, Patrice Rushen.

"Free jazz was a big influence on us too, as was reggae. There is a huge reggae scene in Bristol, and it really rubbed off on us. To me, it was just natural that we found all that music really fantastic. We revered it, we danced to it, we went to shebeens and to blues clubs.

"We had a house on a street in St Paul's which became the Maximum Joy hub. I lived there for a couple of years. The Black & White Café, where the St Paul's riots started, was at the bottom of the road. It felt very pertinent and real and completely understood. It was part of where we lived, part of

what was going on for people that we were close to, for people that lived with us. It was all happening around the time that we started as a band. We were developing our music during 1980 and got our first single out in 1981.

"For the B-side, 'Silent Street', we didn't consciously think, 'Let's make a dub track'. Most of our songs evolved in the rehearsal room – it was pretty organic in that way. Somebody would play a riff and then we'd build a song around it. It was communally made, but the actual words for 'Silent Street' were written by Tony, and he clearly wrote them as a reflection of living in St Paul's. It was probably slightly by osmosis that the sultry reggae feel came through.

"What was interesting was that it was almost natural for us to do a dub version of all our tracks. We did a seven-inch which was more radio length, and then we'd do a 12-inch extended mix with a dub side, which was what you'd often find on a reggae dubplate.

"In a way, 'Stretch' was the punkiest tune we made, although that bassline was pretty funky. Again, it evolved in rehearsal. The words were collaborative – you might just have a concept or an idea and then you'd build on that gradually, and it could take a few weeks. We'd also play the tracks live before recording them, so the arrangement would be tweaked.

"It was unspoken, but at the time, the feeling we had was to make this about stretching things to the limit, about standing up in the face of adversity and how you stay positive. It went contra to some of the other orators around then who had a more protest-style approach. For us, it was a protest but in a slightly more roundabout way, saying, 'Come on, let's do things differently'. It was basically just about dancing!

"We had links with Dick O'Dell via The Pop Group. He signed us to his label, Y Records, and we recorded that first single on 6 and 7 July 1981 at Berry Street Studio in London. It was pretty state-of-the-art for that era, with a big mixing desk and a good clean sound.

"We'd do one day per track, and that's including mixing. We didn't start until 11am, but with the understanding that we wouldn't leave until it was finished. We'd work long hours, until two, three, four in the morning, but generally, nobody would leave. Everyone would be part of it, so it was a very collaborative production.

"I couldn't quite believe how fast things took off from the moment the single came out. John Peel really liked it and plugged it a lot. To have something endorsed by Peel was immense for us, and we did a session for him on the basis of the single in October that year. Dick was liaising with 99 Records in New York about some of the other Y stablemates, and they wanted to put out 'Stretch' too, which was great. It became a bit of an underground hit in the nightclubs of New York at the time.

"Jamming around tracks in the rehearsal studio created an energy. We each brought in something slightly different, but the main cohesive thing was that we all loved the same music and were united in wanting to evolve. I think we got two more singles and an album out by the end of September 1982. We didn't want to stand around. I mean, what band does?"

'Stretch' b/w 'Silent Street' is out now via Bandcamp. 'Joy Again', an album by MXMJoY – the new incarnation of Maximum Joy – is also out now on London Field Recordings

WALK ON THE WILD SIDE

While many musicians rediscover an interest in the natural world, few go as far as **David Chatton Barker** and **Sam McLaughlin** of Folklore Tapes. In a very literal sense, they have been finding extraordinary new ways to make music with the elements...

WORDS: JOE CLAY

As a musician and founder of Folklore Tapes, the pre-eminent label-cum-research project exploring vernacular arcana via music, David Chatton Barker's practice has always been rooted in the landscape. Yet it was only after a move in 2018 to Analogue Farm, a smallholding located at the foothills of the Pennines in the Lancashire town of Whitworth, that Chatton Barker and his longtime associate Sam McLaughlin began working with nature in a more direct sense.

The pair's latest project, 'Environmental Meditation Music', comes from a unique collaborative process in which hand-built instruments were placed in a natural environment to create what Chatton Barker calls "indeterminate and ever-shifting sound patterns". They were, quite literally, played by the elements – responding to rain, wind and flowing water.

"The instruments take their cues from where they are made," he says over the phone from Analogue Farm, as ducks quack merrily in the background.

"A long time ago, Sam made a harp in a tree. It was a bit of a joke at first – an attempt to install something that stays there. But then we heard it being played by the elements. The branch was being blown by the wind, and was essentially strumming it, and raindrops were landing on the strings and making a pleasing sound. We sat with this for a while and realised that it was constant, but ever-changing.

"There's a Daoist simplicity behind it," he continues. "Less is more, relinquishing a certain amount of responsibility… it's a bit like fishing – you set up the equipment, leave it and see what sounds you can net."

That analogy is especially pertinent when it comes to the water-based tracks on 'EMM'. One of the most eye-catching instruments McLaughlin created was a water harp, which he modelled on ancient Aeolian strings, but adapted to be used in water and modified with a contact mic to capture the sounds. Because of the noise they make, drips play an important role throughout the project, often providing a rhythmic element in the compositions. Collaborating with nature, though, frequently brings its own unique set of challenges.

"If you're jamming by your own hand, it's much easier to be able to say what works," admits Chatton Barker. "This is different. It's nature. Recording wind is a difficult thing. It can sometimes take precedence over everything and cause distortion. It's easy to reject that and say it didn't work.

"Sam found that some tunings worked better than others, especially with the water harps. Some could be a bit dark or morose, but others were really warm and angelic. Occasionally, rain would hit the contact mic and create distortion.

"And in terms of working with the trees, they all move differently. Pine trees, for example, are quite dense in their foliage and they move in a gentle, less erratic way. There was a process of filtering to a certain extent, but if the set-up was good and clean, it made the whole thing listenable and agreeable."

The next challenge the pair faced was in deciding how to turn what they'd recorded into an album. They discovered that the best results came when they were able to sit with each piece as it developed and "tune into that way of experiencing it and listening to it".

There are arresting short clips here and there – like a rhythmic loop that was immediately pleasing – but Chatton Barker is adamant that it is best listened to in long form, which created difficulties when it came to editing the source material down to a 40-minute album.

"We tried not to hack into it too much, so one side is a 20-minute take. We love vinyl, so there needed to be a physical component to it, but the material does lend itself to more expansive listening. Once you've been with it for a while, something starts to happen."

As well as the vinyl release, which was funded through a Kickstarter campaign, 'EMM' is also available as a 90-minute download, and Chatton Barker is enthusiastic about creating online "video experiences" that could be even longer. One of the Kickstarter rewards allows supporters to pay to visit Analogue Farm and observe some of the installations first-hand. Mind you, anyone lucky enough to do that may find that they start to sense something strange happening…

"I was recording the drips in the dell near here and after a while of sitting with it, I felt another presence coming in," says Chatton Barker. "The water harp stuff is the most arresting and otherworldly. You can almost hear voices from other realms creeping in, like a conversation. For me, nature is supernatural. It's an incredible thing to witness, and the supernatural is definitely there in those recordings. The instruments are devices to translate certain voices and characteristics of nature."

Even the artwork for 'EMM' has been left in nature's hands. Every cover is unique, having been created using three time-based automated drawing techniques known as EMV (environmental meditation visuals).

"The 'treesel' is an easel that was movable at different angles, so we could place it in front of a branch, attach a brush to the end of it, and dip it in ink," explains Chatton Barker. "The wind moved the branch and the brush started to create these marks that were almost Eastern-looking symbols, which tied in nicely with the Daoist/Zen thing we had going on."

Other processes involved raindrops interacting with watercolour paints to produce abstract drip paintings, and an Anglepoise lamp with a magnifying glass attached to scorch a line, charting Earth's gradual rotation.

"The project feels endless," muses Chatton Barker as we round things up. "That was why it was so difficult to find an end point and to commit to the physical thing. When we listened back to it, it sounded different every time. It has that feeling of metamorphosis. I hope that carries through when people listen to it."

'Environmental Meditation Music' is out now on Folklore Tapes

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SOUND AND VISIONARY

The publication of her acclaimed autobiography in 2017 set in motion a chain of events that found Cosey Fanni Tutti standing shoulder to shoulder with Delia Derbyshire and a medieval mystic called Margery Kempe. With her new 'Re-Sisters' book and a Delia film soundtrack in the shops, plus an intriguing biopic on the way, the fearless electronic disruptor continues to push the envelope

WORDS: NEIL MASON

I'm having elevenses with Cosey Fanni Tutti at her kitchen table. We're a stone's throw from the historic market town of King's Lynn in Norfolk – although admittedly a big one, across several miles of fields – and I'm here to discuss a book, a soundtrack and a film, each of which is related to the other in various surprising and fascinating ways.

As Chris Carter busies himself on tea and coffee duty, our conversation turns to how everything seems to have slotted nicely into place for Cosey since the publication of her 'Art Sex Music' autobiography in 2017.

"We feel very, very lucky," she declares. "It's because of the book, and everything that's happened since, that we could say, 'OK, no more live shows'."

Unbelievably, Cosey turned 70 last year. Chris will catch her up in January. While both of them look in fine fettle, they say they have felt the need to slow down a little for a while.

"We came back from a gig one time and we were so tired that we put the bags by the sofa and both literally crawled up the stairs to go to bed," remembers Cosey. "That's not good."

It seems that 'Art Sex Music' was the catalyst for change, although her expectations for her first foray into publishing were not that high.

"I decided to write my autobiography because I had been asked to do it no end of times," she says. "But I didn't expect a publisher to take it up and I certainly didn't expect it to sell. I was just pleased to get it out there. Once it was done, I could pack it all away."

It was an opportunity to tell her story, reclaim the narrative, tick "write memoir" off the list, and move on. But the book had other ideas. It was brilliantly received, catapulting her into the limelight and onto a promotional book tour that took her away from home for long periods.

"There is a disconnect when you're away a lot," she says. "I'd come back and do the garden, but it didn't really feel like my garden because I'd been away for so long. I needed to connect with home again and the pandemic provided that opportunity. It gave Chris and I the time to assess what we were doing. Did we want to play live or did we want to work in the studio? It's cause and effect, isn't it? You can't do the gigs without the material, but the material was mainly looking backwards and we wanted to move forwards."

While the couple didn't rule out "a few solo engagements", they decided they would no longer perform as Carter Tutti or as Carter Tutti Void, their side project with Nik Colk Void from Factory Floor. Chris & Cosey had already been decommissioned, playing their live swan song at the Subliminal Impulse festival in Manchester in 2019.

"That was sad," notes Cosey. "It took me a while to come to terms with it, but as much as we love the live work, I know we can't do it anymore. It doesn't stop, though, just because we're no longer performing. Not at all."

It really doesn't. And while they might be stepping back, any notion of retirement is swiftly dealt with.

"Someone said to me recently, 'Are you retiring?'," recounts Cosey, the indignation prickling in her voice. "From what? You don't retire when you're creative. You can't. It's who you are. You carry on. And I think I'd be so bored. What would I do, join a bowls club?"

She could join a bowls club now if she wanted to, I offer.

"Exactly," she says. "It doesn't make any difference. You can go and do those things as well."

So she'll be joining the local bowls club, then?

"No."

The publication of her autobiography kicked the interest in Cosey up several notches. 'Art Sex Music' was such a frank and vivid account of her life that it compounded the admiration of those already familiar with her, as well as attracting a whole new audience. As The Guardian review neatly put it, "Forever accustomed to life as an outsider, Tutti has never sought approval, but now it's here whether she likes it or not".

Cosey's follow-up book holds equal appeal. 'Re-Sisters: The Lives And Recordings Of Delia Derbyshire, Margery Kempe And Cosey Fanni Tutti' features more autobiographical material and also embraces two other remarkable women. Delia Derbyshire needs no introduction on these pages, but Margery Kempe most likely does. Rather than some undiscovered electronic pioneer, Margery was a 15th century mystic visionary and 'Re-Sisters' lifts the lid, through some very thorough research, on the many connections that link the lives of these three trailblazing women across 600 years.

The coincidences and meetings of minds that spiralled out from the success of Cosey's 'Art Sex Music' are a delight. The story has the air of a magician distracting their audience to pull off some audacious sleight of hand. While people were getting excited about 'Art Sex Music' over there, three other projects were about to burst into life over here. Fittingly, it starts back in Cosey's home city of Hull with COUM Transmissions, the performance art group that spawned Throbbing Gristle.

"I was asked to do a COUM Transmissions retrospective for the Hull City Of Culture festival in 2017," she explains. "Chris and I had been working on some sound pieces, some harmonic actions, where we'd make recordings and create music around the actual places we were playing. So I thought I would put together a COUM harmonic collection, a film with images from my childhood and samples from COUM for the soundtrack. It was very Hull-centric."

PHOTO: JAMES DE ARA

The work was called 'Harmonic COUMaction' and Cosey performed the soundtrack live at the Hull festival. Later on in 2017, she staged a solo exhibition at the Cabinet Gallery in Vauxhall, south London, and the film resurfaced as an audio-visual installation in the basement.

"You got to the basement in a lift and the sound became louder and louder as you were travelling down," recalls Cosey of the set-up. "When the lift doors opened, you got an intense blast of sound and visuals, with all the images bleeding in and out of each other. There were buildings that looked as though they were melting and crumbling. It was almost like watching this world that I had created fall apart. It was a full-body kind of experience."

Among the visitors to the exhibition was the actor Caroline Catz. She went twice, in fact. Instantly recognisable as "her off the telly", Caroline has had numerous starring roles in UK prime time TV cop shows such as 'The Bill', 'DCI Banks', 'The Vice' and 'Murder In Suburbia', but she's perhaps best known for the comedy drama 'Doc Martin'. Of course, *we* know her as an obsessive electronic music buff who, when looking for someone to soundtrack 'Delia Derbyshire: The Myths And The Legendary Tapes', her film about the BBC Radiophonic Workshop legend, had Cosey in her sights. But why Cosey?

"I've never asked her," says Cosey, sounding surprised at the question.

Ah, but we have.

"I was in the basement of the Cabinet Gallery, listening to the soundtrack and watching the film, and it reminded me of that feeling I had as a child, listening to 'Doctor Who'," Caroline told Electronic Sound in early 2021, when she spoke to Matt Parker about her Delia film. "There was something really primal and fascinating about this sound – you can't really understand where it's come from, but you become emotionally attached to it. It was at that moment I thought, 'That's the feeling I want for this film I'm going to make about Delia'. So I was having this fantasy, sitting there thinking, 'God, can you imagine if Cosey would do it?'."

Without even realising it, Cosey had tapped directly into Caroline's thinking. It was a collaboration waiting to happen. Around the same time, Cosey and Chris were set to take part in an onstage live chat with Mute boss Daniel Miller at the Rough Trade East record shop in London, to mark the 40th anniversary reissue of Throbbing Gristle's 'The Second Annual Report'. Wasting no time at all, Caroline was in the audience along with a friend who knew Cosey. A plan was afoot.

Did Cosey know who Caroline was?

"I saw her in the room that night and I was like, 'I know who you are'," says Cosey. "We used to watch 'Doc Martin' and I'd seen her in a couple of other things on TV. I really liked her. I liked her face and she has a nice vibe. And it's multiplied by a thousand when you meet her."

Back at Rough Trade East, the pair were introduced. Caroline outlined the plan for her film about Delia and asked Cosey if she would be interested in getting involved with the soundtrack.

"I was really excited by it," smiles Cosey. "I think I fed off Caroline's enthusiasm. She had no doubt at all that I was going to do it. And that just made me think, 'Well, of course I'll do it'."

As the book's title suggests, 'Re-Sisters: The Lives And Recordings Of Delia Derbyshire, Margery Kempe And Cosey Fanni Tutti' documents three women consumed by their passion for life, expressed through music, art and devotion. It was while Cosey and Caroline were beginning to tune in to Delia that the early Christian mystic Margery Kempe pitched up. It seems wild that she revealed herself when she did. But magic is magic.

This part of the story begins with the converted school near King's Lynn that Cosey and Chris call home.

"We've lived here for nearly 40 years," Cosey tells me. "We always wanted to live in the country. Even back in the TG days, we talked about getting an old school or a church, doing it up, and everybody living there. So when Chris and I had our son Nick, we knew we had to get him out of London before he went to nursery. We wanted somewhere quiet. We didn't want him to be streetwise by the age of four."

The family were living in Tottenham – which Cosey describes as "pretty heavy going" – prior to moving to Norfolk in 1985. A few weeks after they had left London, the Broadwater Farm riots kicked off down the road from their old place. But why Norfolk? What was the attraction?

"I think it goes back to when I first met Chris," says Cosey. "One of his friends' sisters was looking at houses in Dalton's Weekly one day and she said, 'Norfolk's great'. I think that idea stuck with me. We found this place when I picked up the local paper and there it was."

Fast-forward a few decades and Cosey gradually started to become aware of the name Margery Kempe, who had lived in King's Lynn in the late 14th and early 15th centuries.

"I'd seen her name around, but I had never actually thought about who she was," says Cosey. "There are quite a few charity shops in the town, which is where I found her book. I thought, 'I've heard of her'. But then when I saw she was a mystic and a visionary, I thought, 'I've got to read this'. I just fell in love with her whole story."

It's easy to see why. The life of this medieval wife, mother, businesswoman, pilgrim and visionary is detailed in 'The Book Of Margery Kempe', which happens to be the earliest surviving English language autobiography. That's pretty remarkable in itself, but all the more so because she was a woman.

Born into a well-heeled family in around 1373, Margery was married at 20 and claims she had a vision of Christ during the birth of her first child. She continued to have visions and hear voices for the next two decades, during which time she gave birth to a further 13 children. She also somehow found time to buy and run a mill and a brewery. It was only at the age of 40 that she followed what she saw as her calling – a chaste life and several epic pilgrimages.

"After I had found her book, I went to a talk about Margery in King's Lynn," says Cosey. "It was given by two historians, Anthony Bale and Susan Maddock, and they were such a big help to me when I was writing about her. As I was interpreting her life, I'd go to them and ask them if I was going in the right direction thinking this or that about Margery. It was really rewarding, because I seemed to be getting it right."

At one point in 'Re-Sisters', Cosey describes how she was taking questions from the audience at a book signing for 'Art Sex Music' when a man asked if she had written the autobiography herself. A collective groan was heard around the room. The question isn't quite so simple in Margery's case, though.

"In my mind, Margery 'wrote' her book… although she didn't physically write it herself," explains Cosey. "I discovered from Anthony that reading and writing, as we do it today, didn't go in parallel then. You could be taught to read, but it was a totally different skill to writing. That helped me understand Margery better. Other than doing her domestic books, why would she need to write?"

Especially when writing, as in being a scribe, was a whole other job.

"No one is quite sure who she used for her book," adds Cosey. "There was a lot of protection going on, some of it because of her being accused of heresy, but also because of the social and cultural restrictions she was under as a woman. But scribes tended to be clerics, so having a holy man on her side gave her book authority."

'The Book Of Margery Kempe' features some rather hairy tales about her fleeing from mobs who were ready and willing to burn her on the spot.

"Some people recognised her as a special person, as a holy person," says Cosey. "She certainly stood out and wasn't going to do what she was told. She was clever and she knew The Bible well enough to be able to talk her way out of being torched."

Margery was quite clearly something of a divisive figure, not least because her devotion was expressed through extensive weeping and wailing, all of it very loud. Her bizarre behaviour landed her in hot water on more than one occasion. And yet she persisted. You can see why Cosey was intrigued by her.

"I love the fact that this woman was born up the road from here and travelled thousands of miles on pilgrimages, doing all of these amazing things for a woman of that time," she says. "It's incredible."

It's pretty odd that Margery survived childbirth so many times but her children aren't mentioned in her book, isn't it?

"Women spat kids out all the time," counters Cosey. "That was their role, so it wasn't important for her to write about it. What was important for her to write about was her piety – her love of God and Jesus."

Does Cosey have faith?

"I have faith in people," she replies. "But it's a funny thing to define, isn't it? I like the idea of it. I just don't like it when it's manipulated to control people. I'm not religious at all and I don't agree with the indoctrination surrounding religion, but that's what life was like in Margery's day. Everything went through God. That's how they lived."

Margery embarked on the first of her pilgrimages in 1413. Over the next 20 years or so, she travelled not only throughout England, but to Jerusalem, Rome and Santiago de Compostela in Spain. And not an EasyJet flight in sight.

"She'd get a boat across to wherever and then travel by land," notes Cosey. "To get to Jerusalem, she went over the Alps. She went over the Alps! It sounds crazy, doesn't it?"

There's a movie there, surely?

"Someone needs to make it," agrees Cosey. "That would be truly amazing."

Around the same time as her solo show at the Cabinet Gallery, yet another avenue was opening up for Cosey. A film director called Andrew Hulme had been in touch with her, expressing his interest in making a biopic based on 'Art Sex Music'. He emailed her directly, introducing himself and mentioning that their paths had crossed some years before at an ambient music festival at Melkweg in Amsterdam. Andrew was there with his band O Yuki Conjugate. "That was a relief… he wasn't 'Hollywood', more arthouse," writes Cosey in 'Re-Sisters'.

A deal was struck and the film adaption of 'Art Sex Music' is currently in pre-production. It must be a bit disconcerting when someone tells you they'd like to make a movie about your life?

"It was strange," admits Cosey. "I never thought I'd get an offer like that. When I found out who Andrew was and realised there was that connection of music and us being in the same place at the same time years ago, that's what cemented it for me. I thought, 'Well, how could you not do a film with someone who has a similar approach to music and life?'."

It's coincidental, or perhaps it's magic again, but at that time Cosey was about to appear on the silver screen playing herself. Caroline Catz had hit upon the idea that Cosey should feature alongside Delia in 'The Myths And The Legendary Tapes'. They would be kind of ghosts to each other – Caroline in the role of Delia in her Radiophonic Workshop prime in the 1960s and Cosey searching for Delia's spirit in the present day.

"When Caroline first spoke to me about it, I said, 'Oh, I don't know, I don't want to spoil your film'," notes Cosey. "She said because I was doing the soundtrack in the present, and because of all the women who have been influenced by Delia or myself, it would make sense that there was Delia and then there was me representing the here and now. So that's what happened. I was in her film."

PHOTO: JAMES DE ARA

When it comes to the 'Art Sex Music' biopic, someone else will be taking the part of Cosey. "Who would play you in a film about your life?" is a classic question and that thought crossed Cosey's mind straight away. So who did she have lined up?

"In my own head, I was being very ambitious. I thought, 'Oh, I would love…"

And then she catches herself. The movie is very much still under wraps, with everyone involved being careful about what they do and don't say.

"No, I can't tell you."

Go on, who were you thinking of?

"I think the first actor I saw who could possibly do it…" she begins, before pausing again. "No, no, I won't say who it was. But Cosey is cast now anyway. We've got the actor and she's absolutely brilliant."

Nice distraction. So who is going to play you?

"All I can say is she's well-known and she's brilliant."

Who plays Chris?

"We've not got that far yet."

Curses.

"But we've watched the casting tapes together and given feedback on them."

That must have been weird.

"It wasn't as weird as I thought it would be. I thought I'd be projecting myself into it more. They had to do a very emotional scene and they all did it well. Really well."

How do you feel about a film of your life? I guess it's all out there anyway?

"It's different because I've chosen what to write and they are my words," she muses. "The film is something else. It's someone else's interpretation of my story. It's a bit like when you collaborate on a track. You want to take things in a certain direction, but then someone else suggests something and you think, 'Yeah, OK'. And then it becomes what it's meant to be because it's not just yours."

Knowing what we know now, and having watched as her status and importance has grown over the years since her death in 2001, it's hard to understand quite how anonymous Delia Derbyshire was in the eyes – and ears – of BBC viewers and listeners. Was Cosey aware of Delia when she was starting out on her own creative journey back in Hull?

"I wasn't really aware of her until I met Chris," she admits. "Before then, I was on a totally different wavelength with music. I was into heavy stuff and bands like The Velvet Underground. We did an electronic festival with COUM, but I wasn't especially into electronic music. The other thing was the Radiophonic Workshop were working for radio and TV, but I never watched TV when I was younger."

These days, we have a tendency to idealise Delia, but she wasn't the only female electronic music pioneer. She wasn't even the only one at the Workshop.

"I think we do glamourise her, but that's one of the reasons why I wrote 'Re-Sisters'," notes Cosey. "I want everyone to understand the personal side of her and what she went through to do what she did. I want them to know how it was her drive to create music and her love of it that kept her going so long. To think she was possibly bipolar – which could explain a lot of her mood swings – on top of being a woman and dealing with the usual things we have to put up with in all situations, let alone working in studios…"

But why not focus on, say, Daphne Oram?

"I did actually write a long piece about Daphne for the book," says Cosey. "But it was so long, you couldn't get back to Delia or Margery or me by the time you'd finished reading it! I got completely into Daphne and wrote about 10,000 words about her. I thought, 'Right, I'm going to take this to the end', because I loved the way her life unfolded."

A story for another time, then.

A thought that has occurred to Cosey, which she mentions in 'Re-Sisters', is that she and Delia were hoovering around the same parts of London in the mid-1970s. By the time Throbbing Gristle were making waves, Delia had left the Radiophonic Workshop and was working with video artists Elsa Stansfield and Madelon Hooykaas, who drafted her in as the composer for Anthony Roland's short film, 'Circle Of Light: The Photography Of Pamela Bone'.

"But we never met," says Cosey. "There were these different strands of the avant-garde… and she was with one kind, while I was with the other. If only one of the people she worked with or met had known us and piqued her curiosity…"

They probably came tantalisingly close, though. When Delia was working at Elsa Stansfield's studio in Neal's Yard, Cosey was involved with the Art Meeting Place, a creative collective based a few streets away in Covent Garden.

"Funny to think of us possibly passing by each other, both preoccupied with our thoughts on our projects, heading to our workspaces," notes Cosey in 'Re-Sisters'.

What does she think Delia would have made of TG?

"I think she'd have been excited by us," she offers. "What TG did was free of all the things that she did with her rules and systems. That was all thrown out with us. We didn't have a rulebook. Still don't."

The soundtrack for 'Delia Derbyshire: The Myths And The Legendary Tapes' was all about capturing the essence of Delia. Cosey was particularly keen to use Delia's voice on some of the tracks.

"I sampled her voice from interviews she did with a journalist called John Cavanagh," says Cosey. "John very kindly let me use them, so I had her voice on a strip of quarter-inch tape. I ran a tape head along it, giving me tiny pieces of Delia which I then manipulated and used in various ways for different scenes in the film."

Other than snippets of her voice, the rest of the soundtrack consists of entirely original sounds. There are no samples of Delia's music, which was important to Cosey.

"I knew Delia was precious about her work and I didn't feel comfortable remixing it,' she says. "So I took inspiration from her handwritten notes and her references to sound instead. By doing that and using her actual voice to create new sounds, the end result was like a composite of the two of us."

Caroline Catz helped the soundtrack along with suggestions of her own. Interestingly, the process was similar to the way that Delia utilised Ron Grainer's scribbled notes – "swoops", "sweeps", "wind cloud", "wind bubble" – to begin work on her 'Doctor Who' theme.

"Caroline was quite specific because these sounds had to represent images as well as emotions at certain points in the film," explains Cosey. "The visuals weren't done at the time, though, so I had to come up with sounds that I thought would work with the images she had in her mind."

Some of the descriptions Caroline came up with were so good, they became track titles.

"She had 'Ceiling Of Sickening Sound' to describe how Delia felt being put down by men. I knew straight away what that sounded like."

Titles such as 'Delia Tones', 'Corridor' and 'Snuff Chorus' are perhaps obvious references, but some of the others require more explanation.

"'Four Bebe' is a little nod to Bebe Barron," expands Cosey. "I wanted to flag up Bebe's huge contribution and that track put me in mind of her work. With 'Cosmic Static Noise Wasps', that is an amalgamation of three pieces I had for different scenes. I used my Synthi to generate the wasp sounds and also recorded a wasp nest that was under the eaves of our house."

Several of the tracks started out using Delia's original VCS 3 patch sheets, so it was her formula and Cosey's sounds. With analogue synths being what they are, Cosey wasn't able to get an identical match, but it worked well as a jumping-off point. It was also essential that Cosey's equipment list was close to what Delia would have had access to. As well as an EMS Synthi A, her arsenal included her cornet, a guitar, a bunch of guitar pedals – among them a Space Echo – and period oscillators.

"I intentionally mainly had hardware rather than software versions of what Delia used," she explains. "I used the Synthi A a lot, controlled by a Stylophone Gen-R8, and Chris put a small Eurorack case together for me that had a filter, oscilloscope and noise generator. There was the wonderful Nagra portable tape recorder as well, of course."

The Nagra reel-to-reel was a staple machine in the television industry for decades. The one that landed up with Cosey came complete with its BBC identity plate.

"A Nagra had long been on our wish list and serendipitously one turned up right on time," she says. "I adored working with it, even though it has its quirks. I'd make recordings via a mic and create tape loops that were cut and spliced and played into Ableton Live, then bounced back into the Nagra. We used it on set as playback for certain scenes too."

Cosey and Caroline also had full access to Delia's archive, which is based at the John Rylands Library in Manchester. The pair spent a good deal of time there, with their headphones on and notebooks at the ready, listening intently and exchanging excited glances. They wanted to immerse themselves in Delia, both the musician and the person. And the more they dug, the more involved they became.

While Delia didn't get round to penning an autobiography, there's certainly been no shortage of words written about her, many of them in reverential academic tomes which, while celebrating her musical achievements, do little to reveal her character. Over the years, I have read countless articles about Delia and her work, and I have to say that Cosey's new book is the closest anyone has come to painting a picture of her as a person. Warts and all.

"Well, I hope I've done her justice," says Cosey. "I didn't want to portray her as a saint, because she wasn't. None of us are. Sometimes she found it difficult to work with some people and sometimes it was the other way around. She'd have these mood swings until the end. Even with her partner, Clive Blackburn. He was with her during her post-BBC years, so talking to him about that was really interesting. He knew the true Delia. She didn't have to be anyone when she was with him. He understood that and gave her space."

Quite literally, it seems. Being Delia's partner came with its own set of idiosyncrasies. When she relocated to Northampton, she bought a two-bedroom terraced house near the town centre which she shared with Clive. Cosey describes it as a "nest of chaos". Soon enough, Clive found himself moving out and buying his own place around the corner.

"But they remained a couple," notes Cosey. "I'd say that was faith. If you want to know what faith is, it's believing in someone enough to give them space. Clive knew what would make Delia happy and that's why he did that. You've fallen in love with them for who they are… so why would you change them?"

There are also stories about Delia in 'Re-Sisters' that I'd not heard before.

"I'm glad to hear that," says Cosey. "At one point I thought, 'Am I just repeating what everyone else has written about?'. But I wanted the full story. I didn't want to leave things out."

PHOTO: JAMES DE ARA

Did she enjoy the writing process?

"I loved it," she beams. "I got to the point where I was so into the research that I thought, 'Right, what I have to do is research Delia alone, then go on to Margery, then when I get to the parts that connect with me I'll have to get a board'. You know those boards they have for crimes? Where they connect everything up with ribbons? It was like that.

"I was fascinated by everything. I'd go off down these rabbit holes. I kept thinking, 'This isn't relevant, but it's interesting'. And then you'd find somebody who connected with something in Delia's life or in Margery's life and you'd think, 'Well, how did she meet them?', and off you'd go again. It was amazing to work out."

Which is exactly how 'Re-Sisters' comes across. And it's against this backdrop – of extensive research and delving into all corners of her life – that Cosey and Caroline felt such a deep connection with Delia.

"We both had this feeling she was there with us throughout the whole project," says Cosey. "We were constantly referring to her, so she naturally became part of what we were doing. There were three of us involved, not two of us… which I loved. And from that, this new book came out. Not a memoir as such, but three memoirs of three women who have experienced very similar things in similar situations across time."

It's a week since elevenses round Cosey's and I'm at the book launch for 'Re-Sisters'. The choice of venue for tonight's event isn't lost on those who know their Cosey Fanni Tutti. Welcome to the ICA in London.

While she has been back here many times since, this was where COUM Transmissions staged their 'Prostitution' exhibition in October 1976. The opening night marked the debut of Throbbing Gristle, which has long been forgotten in the press uproar that followed what The Daily Express called "Cosey's travelling sex troupe".

Things are more sedate tonight. Cosey is in conversation with the actor Maxine Peake, who she initially met around the publication of 'Art Sex Music' when they recorded an episode of BBC Radio 4's 'Only Artists' series together. They'd got on famously from the off.

There's a section in 'Re-Sisters' that jumped out at me the first time I read it and has stayed with me ever since. In June 2018, Cosey appeared at The Trades Club in Hebden Bridge, Yorkshire, for a gathering much like tonight's, except she was in conversation with the BBC Radio 3 presenter Elizabeth Alker. Her new pal Maxine was there too, along with a raft of friends from film, TV and theatre. "All such down-to-earth, fun people," writes Cosey in the book. "No artsy-fartsy pretentiousness."

This strikes me as a significant moment in Cosey's story. Intriguingly, it's mentioned in 'Re-Sisters' alongside an account of the final live outing for Chris & Cosey at Subliminal Impulse. While the gig marked an ending, the Hebden Bridge event appeared to represent a new beginning.

That quote from The Guardian's review of 'Art Sex Music' pops into my head again, the one about Cosey being an outsider who has never sought approval "but now it's here whether she likes it or not". These strong, talented and empowered women forming a circle around her seemed to be just what she needed.

Also in attendance at Hebden Bridge was film director Carol Morley, who is best known for her 2011 drama-documentary 'Dreams Of A Life' and whose presence Cosey remembers being proclaimed by somebody cheerily shouting, "Oh look, it's only Carol fucking Morley!". Comedian Lucy Beaumont was there too. Like Cosey, she also hails from Hull. At the end of the night, Lucy had revealed to Cosey that they're connected. Her godmother is Cosey's Aunt Margaret.

"It's nuts, isn't it?" chuckles Cosey when I ask her about it.

Did Hebden Bridge feel like the start of something?

"Absolutely," she confirms. "It was like having your batteries charged. Those sort of women are like this ball of energy. It was wonderful. I'd not been among women like that for a long time and I'd really, really missed it."

Why does she think it left her feeling so rejuvenated?

"I don't ever expect to meet with people that I can connect with immediately, or people who know enough about me that we don't have to access the whole 'What do you do?' conversation. Over the years, when people ask, 'What do you do?', I always think, 'Oh my god, what do I say?'."

What do you say?

"What *do* I say?," she replies, rolling her eyes. "If I tell them I make music, they say, 'Oh, what are you called?', followed by, 'Never heard of you'. Immediate dismissal, you know."

Do you get asked that a lot in your day-to-day life?

"We've never discussed it with the neighbours," she says.

Her response recalls a passage from 'Art Sex Music', as she recounts taking her young son to a toddler group in the village hall during the family's early days in Norfolk. "I didn't have a lot in common with the other mothers," she deadpans.

"My friend who lived down the road – she's passed on now, sadly – she knew all about us," adds Cosey. "She was amazing. In fact, she was the subject of my thesis."

A thesis?

"I did a Women's Studies course with The Open University," she reveals. "I never thought I would do it, but I was so pleased I did. It was when I first got my heart complaint, in around 1990. We couldn't do gigs or anything at the time. An OU advert came on the telly and Chris said, 'Why don't you do a degree?'. And I said [splutters with laughter]… but I did."

I can imagine Cosey doing well in academia. Talking to her, poking around in her thoughts, reading her books, she has much to offer. Has she ever thought about being Dr Cosey? Professor Fanni Tutti? She laughs like a drain.

"I don't know. I never think about it."

Does that not appeal to her? Being an academic?

"That tickles me," she smiles. "It tickles me."

After Cosey and Maxine's entertaining chat at the ICA, the audience files out and forms an orderly queue to get their newly published copies of 'Re-Sisters' signed. I stand at the back of the room and watch as Cosey and Maxine embrace Caroline Catz and Carol "fucking" Morley, who had both been in the crowd tonight. Cosey signs Carol's book with that very inscription. She is clearly in her element.

A little while later, a photo of Cosey, Caroline, Maxine and Carol appears on social media. It's a life-affirming image. They seem to be such a tight-knit group and it's brilliant to see these diverse creative forces enjoying each other's company.

Funny how things work out. Funny how things start out.

The soundtrack to 'Delia Derbyshire: The Myths And The Legendary Tapes' is out now on Conspiracy International. 'Re-Sisters: The Lives And Recordings Of Delia Derbyshire, Margery Kempe And Cosey Fanni Tutti' is published by Faber & Faber

PHOTO: ANTON CORBIJN

With a new boxset marking the 50th anniversary of their self-titled 1972 debut album, Neu!'s pioneering krautrock groove continues to resonate. Here, Michael Rother sheds light on irascible Neu! co-founder Klaus Dinger, his time with Kraftwerk, and the Bowie collaboration that never quite came to pass

WORDS: STEPHEN DALTON

GET YOUR MOTORIK RUNNIN'

"Fifty years sounds terrifying!" exclaims Michael Rother, the eerily ageless Peter Pan of krautrock, incredulous that a full half-century has somehow whooshed by since he first began mapping a whole other universe of sonic possibilities as part of seminal Düsseldorf duo, Neu!. "Where have all the years gone?"

Speaking from his current home in Pisa, Italy, Rother is looking back on a rich five-decade career that has seen him collaborate with Kraftwerk, Brian Eno, Iggy Pop, Sonic Youth and others, not to mention a mysterious near-miss with a certain David Bowie – more on that in a sec. Yet Rother's legendary reputation primarily rests on the intense burst of creative chemistry he shared with Neu! co-founder Klaus Dinger between 1971 and 1975, producing three magnificent albums full of avant-rock, proto-punk, techno-primitive brilliance.

Alongside fellow krautpop founding fathers, Can and Kraftwerk, Neu! imbued rock with a fresh and experimental vocabulary that still resonates to this day. Indeed, the lavish new boxset, '50!', houses not only their classic albums but also boasts a feast of remixes and remakes by an impressive international guestlist of artists, including New Order's Stephen Morris, The National, Yann Tiersen, Gabe Gurnsey, Mogwai and even Bristol emo-punks, Idles.

Rother approved every track in the anthology, but admits he is not always familiar with the ever-growing army of musicians who continue to draw inspiration from the deep musical reservoir that is Neu!.

"Confession time – I don't know so much about what these bands are doing," he grins sheepishly. "I think it's the result of my decision decades ago to stop listening and focus on my own music. It's not being arrogant – I'm just so filled up with everything I'm doing."

Coincidentally, Kraftwerk's Ralf Hütter once told me something similar – that he never listens to outside music, only silence.

"I guess Ralf and I have a few things in common," Rother nods. "He was the first person there when I entered the studio and realised I was not alone. This idea of enjoying silence… I could have said that."

That first studio experience was alongside Hütter in an embryonic version of Kraftwerk in 1971. Rother was 21 and playing guitar in garage bands while working as an orderly at a Düsseldorf mental hospital – his mandatory alternative to military service as an anti-war conscientious objector. A colleague invited him to an improvised jam session with Hütter and Florian Schneider, which also included Dinger on drums. When Hütter left temporarily to complete his university studies, Rother and Dinger joined Schneider in a short-lived, three-piece jazz-rock version of the future techno-pop titans.

The rough tracks for a second Kraftwerk album, which the trio recorded before Hütter returned, have never surfaced, but Rother cautions against romanticising these experimental noodlings as buried treasure.

"I can put everyone's mind at ease," he laughs. "We were really not that great. Some elements were fine, but I think we were just not ready. The concept couldn't be transported from the live stage into the studio."

But Rother's brief Kraftwerk apprenticeship was not fruitless. It introduced him to Dinger, the percussive powerhouse who almost single-handedly invented krautrock's fabled "motorik" beat, and the pair duly became Neu!, a dynamic duo whose fiercely inventive musical energy was matched only by the combustible tensions between them. Even today, Rother struggles to define their prickly partnership as a friendship.

"Ha! It was not easy," he says. "It doesn't sound nice, and I know it seems ridiculous, but we were never friends. Klaus and I were so different. My girlfriend didn't like him. Nobody liked him. Actually, my mother did like him, but then she didn't have to work with the guy! OK, I liked maybe the musical expression of his qualities, and my mother was also very musical. But I couldn't ever be friends with a person with the traits that Klaus had."

Rother remembers Dinger as a kinetic, propulsive force of nature in the studio. It was not unusual for him to end a performance with a blood-splattered drum kit from the ferocity of his playing, or hyperventilating so much that he almost fainted, toppling off his stool in a dizzy haze. But behind this fierce intensity lay self-destructive rage.

"When I met him, he didn't come across as an angry young man – he was just a very strong-headed, determined drummer," Rother recalls. "Klaus was so powerful. He gave the impression that nothing would stop him. That was what attracted me, of course, this energy. The anger Klaus later developed when things started failing – business ideas, his own label, his relationship with a girlfriend who moved with her parents to Norway – you hear it in the lyrics of 'Hero'."

Crucial to the Neu! sound was legendary studio producer Conny Plank, who helped make the duo's experimental ambitions concrete, even in a pre-digital era of primitive studio effects.

"Conny had a brilliant musical mind," says Rother. "What amazes me when I listen to 'Hallogallo', for instance, is that he could remember where all the good guitar parts were, mixing on the spot with no computer."

Rother describes Plank as "humble, modest and careful" but disputes suggestions that the producer played a peacemaker role in Neu!.

"There's a common misunderstanding that he was required to mediate between the two crazies, Dinger and Rother, which was not really true. Klaus and I didn't fight about music. Just everything else, ha!"

Even after two albums together, Neu! still struggled to make their full sound work on stage. So, in 1973, Rother travelled to the famous Forst farmhouse commune in Lower Saxony to meet Hans-Joachim Roedelius and Dieter Moebius of Cluster, initially hoping to recruit them as live collaborators. Instead, the trio ended up forming a new band, electro-pastoral supergroup Harmonia. It was, Rother says, "musical love at first sight". It was also the beginning of the end for Neu!, especially when Rother relocated to live full-time in Forst.

In 1974, while Rother was preoccupied with Harmonia, Dinger began to assemble his La Düsseldorf project with his brother Thomas and percussionist Hans Lampe. The band would eventually enjoy short-lived commercial success in the new wave era. But before Dinger fully mastered his new role as frontman and guitarist, he visited Rother in Forst to propose a Harmonia/La Düsseldorf partnership. The meeting did not go down well, ending in a violent altercation.

"Oh, everyone hated him in Forst!" Rother laughs. "He was already so arrogant, trying to be super-duper… Maybe we would have given it a try if he had been modest, but he came in his Mercedes, trying to be a rock star, and that didn't work with Harmonia. He went to a local discotheque and provoked people just to be noticed. He was very aggressive in his desire to be noticed."

The rustic calm of Forst thoroughly suited Rother's temperament, but darkness was lurking on the edge of town. The 1970s was a bloody decade in Germany, scarred by Baader-Meinhof violence, when long-haired musicians frequently came under suspicion as potential terrorist sympathisers.

Armed officers stopped and searched Harmonia in Brussels in 1974, and the Forst commune was raided by police looking for drugs or weapons. But even though Rother had anti-war principles, his political affinity lay much more with liberal Cold War peacemakers such as chancellor Willy Brandt than with armed hippie radicals.

"No, I never felt any sympathy for Baader-Meinhof," he says. "They started killing innocent people – they were crazy and totally out of control. There were of course some ideas in the student movements I agreed with, but violence as a political force? I always refuted that."

Contracted to make one last studio album together, Rother and Dinger reunited with Plank in December 1974 to record 'Neu! 75'. The duo mostly worked separately and disbanded as soon as the album was released. Even so, the last part of their canonical trilogy remains a proto-punk classic, featuring anthemic tracks like 'Hero' and 'Seeland'. Around the same time, Rother was invited to rejoin Kraftwerk for their marathon 1975 tour promoting the worldwide success of 'Autobahn'.

"Florian called me and asked if I would be interested in joining the band again," Rother recalls. "But I declined. I was totally focused on Harmonia. Before that, I remember meeting Florian and Ralf and playing the first Harmonia album to them in my car. I was happy they seemed impressed, because I was very convinced of Harmonia's music. Ha! Later, I found out I was quite alone in that, with the exception of David Bowie and Brian Eno, who picked it up very early."

Indeed, interest from Eno and Bowie would prove bittersweet for Rother. In September 1976, just as Harmonia were starting to unravel, Eno stopped off in Forst for an 11-day collaborative session. The expanded band recorded a gorgeous autumnal album, later titled 'Tracks And Traces', which was subsequently lost for two decades. In interviews around that period, Eno called Harmonia "the world's most important rock group".

In late 1976, Rother also completed his debut solo album, 'Flammende Herzen', an instrumental affair featuring Conny Plank and Jaki Liebezeit of Can. Soon after its release, Rother was contacted by Bowie, who invited him to play guitar on his landmark Berlin album, 'Heroes'. But this session fell through for reasons which remain murky to this day. Decades later, Bowie would claim in interviews that Rother turned him down. The guitarist remembers things very differently.

"It was the summer of 1977 when we talked, and we were both very excited about collaborating," he insists. "Why in the end didn't it work? I've tried to make sense of these contradictions."

Rother eventually concluded that somebody in Bowie's management or label baulked at him working with an avant-garde German guitarist following modest sales for the bold synth-rock futurism of 'Low'.

"Maybe David changed his mind and forgot he'd changed his mind – that's a possibility too," he shrugs. "But I don't even think that. In our conversation, he was totally thrilled. He wanted the guitar he knew from 'Flammende Herzen' and 'Hero' and the Neu! albums."

Although they never got to play together, Rother's influence on Bowie's Berlin-era albums was pretty blatant, particularly the kosmische twang and clatter of 'Lodger'. In 2001 the pair exchanged emails, and Bowie apologised for his bad memory after misnaming Rother "Klaus Dinger" in an interview, mixing up the two band members. A decade later, when Neu! were preparing reissues and asking various musicians for promotional quotes, Bowie was fulsome in his praise.

"David was generous – he wrote a nice piece," Rother grins. "But he got the names wrong again!"

PHOTO: RICK BURGER

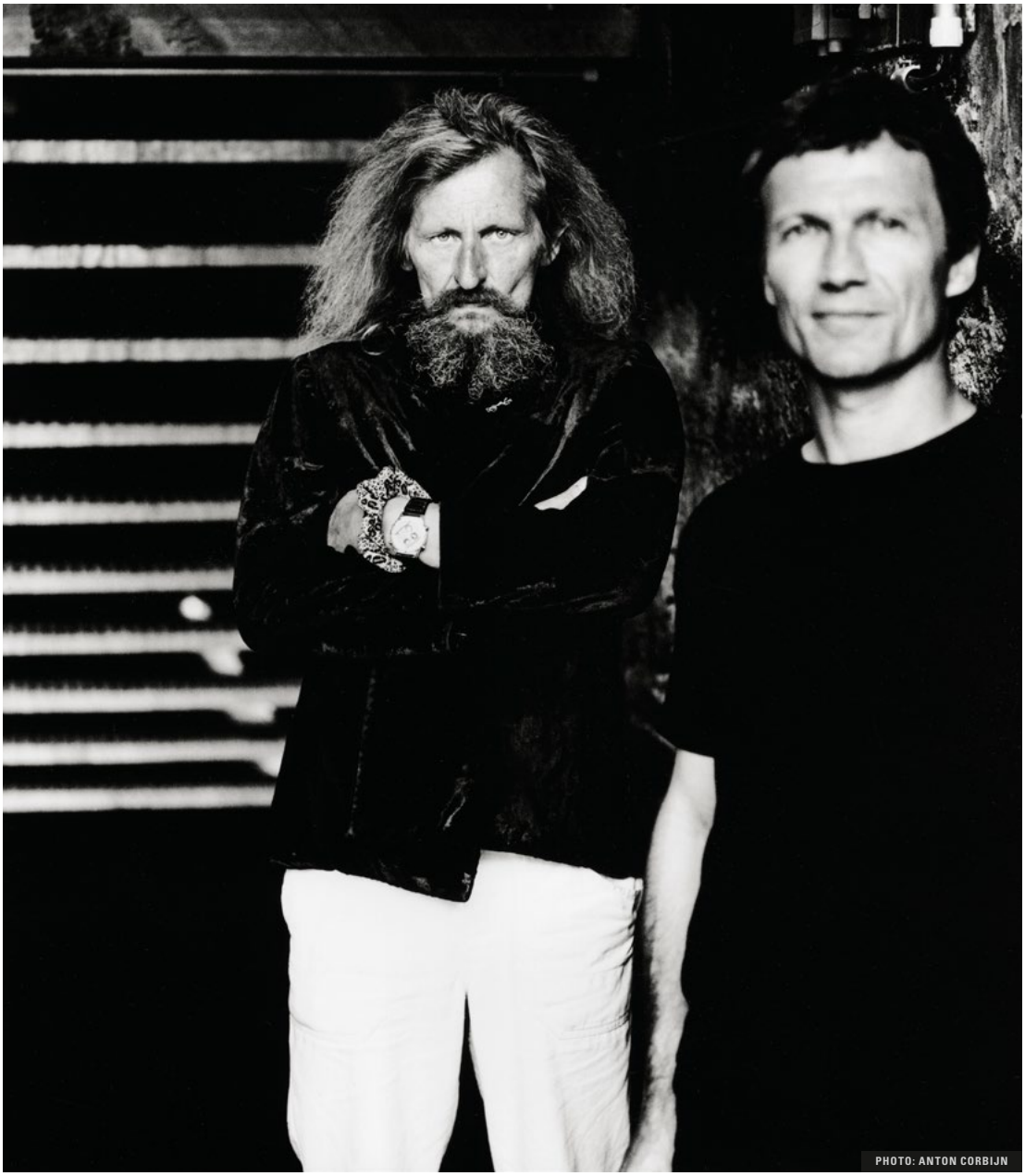


PHOTO: ANTON CORBIJN

Following their 1975 split, Neu! had a troubled afterlife. Rother built a modestly successful major-label solo career in the late 1970s and 1980s, increasingly trading his guitar for ambient, fragrant, ruminative electronica. Dinger's journey proved more erratic, enjoying brief pop success with La Düsseldorf before the band imploded due to bad business decisions, shifting fashions, bitter court cases and the suicide of keyboard player Andreas Schell.

Dinger and Rother attempted a Neu! studio reunion in late 1985, but recording was aborted due to familiar tensions. Although the tapes were sealed and shelved, Dinger would later release them as the duo's unofficial fourth album, 'Neu! 4', in 1995, without Rother's knowledge or consent, followed in 1996 by the unapproved rehearsal tapes collection 'Neu! '72 Live! In Düsseldorf'. This "act of despair" was reportedly Dinger's response to the deluge of shady bootlegs available at a time when the band's official catalogue was stranded in semi-legal limbo, but it soured any possible future partnership between the pair.

Only after Dinger's death in 2008 did Rother get to polish and correct the raw synthpunk scribbles of 'Neu! 4', reworking and reordering them into the 2010 release 'Neu! 86', which appears in the new boxset. But at the time, he insists, Dinger blocked all bids to secure the band's albums a legal re-release.

"Because Klaus can no longer defend himself, I try to be as fair as possible and not use any opportunity to blame him for everything," Rother says. "If he were around, he would contradict me in many instances. But he gave me a hard time in the 1990s. He had big problems – financial and artistic – which I didn't have. And then he made some bad choices, releasing music behind my back and saying no to every offer that came our way."

One keen suitor was Mute boss Daniel Miller, who persuaded Rother to make a deal for the Neu! canon, only to be blocked by Dinger.

"I told Klaus it was a great label and Daniel was a good guy, but Klaus said, 'No, he's a businessman!'. He didn't want to sign. He didn't trust anyone – he thought they were all gangsters."

Salvation finally came in the unlikely form of Herbert Grönemeyer. The actor and musician, probably best-known in the UK for his co-starring role in the 1981 film, 'Das Boot', is a platinum-selling rock star in Germany. In 1999, Grönemeyer founded his own label Grönland in the shadow of tragedy, following the deaths of his brother Wilhelm and wife Anna from cancer within days of each other.

"People told him, 'Dinger and Rother, they are crazies, they fight all the time! Nobody manages to get them together, and you won't either'. But he invested so much time talking to us, like a psychotherapist. We can laugh about it, but that was the truth. He was so careful trying to find the balance and where the bad spots were. In the end, even Klaus was able to trust this guy. And he didn't trust anyone."

Encouraged by their new deal with Grönemeyer, Rother and Dinger began tentatively discussing plans for a new, 21st century Neu! album. They even checked out possible studios in London. But, once again, internal friction proved insurmountable. When Dinger proposed bashing out an album in just two days, Rother raised a red flag.

"I said, 'Klaus, we couldn't do it back then, and I definitely don't trust us to be able to do it now'," he sighs.

Ultimately, Neu! were fated never to record together again. Dinger died of heart failure in 2008, just three days short of his 62nd birthday. Looking back, Rother says his loss came as a shock, but perhaps it was inevitable.

"Of course, I was totally surprised, but maybe I shouldn't have been. You probably know the story, but on his website he said he was proud of having taken more than 1,000 LSD trips, and I'm sure there must have been other substances. That's the way he treated his body. And his mind."

A whole half-century after his first fateful meeting with Dinger, Rother is almost the last man standing from that first generation of krautrock pioneers. Nowadays he is a revered elder statesman, with a respectable canon of solo releases and a healthy career as a live performer, partly thanks to his evergreen Neu! legacy. But the journey to this point has been bumpy at times, financially and emotionally. Rother has survived, he says, because he realised early on that the razzle-dazzle rock star lifestyle is actually more prison than prize.

"You think about what is really necessary – what you really need," he explains. "I don't need a Maserati. I don't need to fly first class to luxurious places. It's not how much money you make but how much money you spend. I made a lot of money with my first three solo albums but I didn't go crazy. I invested in music gear. The main idea, if I'm lucky to stay in this position, is to stay independent."

These days, Rother divides his time between his long-time home in Forst and Pisa, where he lives with his Italian partner and occasional collaborator, the producer and composer Vittoria Maccabruni. He's just shy of turning 72 when we speak, but he looks much younger – full of boyish energy and zen-like calm, remarkably unscathed by the passing decades.

"Ha! Thank you for the flowers, as we say in Germany," Rother grins. "It's probably mostly due to the genes. It also has to do with life choices. If you struggle with life, it makes you unhappy, if you have strange wishes which drive you the wrong way, like the need for recognition or fame or materialistic things – I guess that leaves marks. I do it my way. That's the short answer. This is something I can be thankful for, this present I was given, to be able to live my life working on the music I love."

The '50!' boxset is out now on Grönland

TRUE COLOURS

Songwriter, musician and all-round chart supremo of four decades, William Orbit has clearly lost neither his producerly nouse, nor his knack for a good story. His new album, 'The Painter', is a wistful, hypnotic and thoroughly immersive voyage into sound

WORDS: JEREMY ALLEN
PICTURES: EVA PENTEL

As you might expect from an album called 'The Painter', William Orbit's first long-player in over eight years is suffused with vibrancy and colour… although light cannot exist without darkness. Its origins lie in the epiphany the feted musician and producer experienced while staying at Two Bunch Palms Resort in Desert Hot Springs, California, a wellness retreat once infamous as a hideout for America's most notorious gangster.

"It was actually established by Al Capone," says Orbit, sitting adjacent to me at his Bayswater apartment in central London, between us a long coffee table loaded with sundry recording devices. "He would go out there when the train lines were opened up and kick back without the risk of getting gunned down in the streets of Chicago. I'm not big on crystals and all that, but it was a magical nexus with a native indigenous population long before the invading Westerners came. And here it is now, this lovely place with the spa and the pool and all the usual things."

Yet, having gone there in an attempt to quit smoking, Orbit was feeling too prickly to indulge in the usual benefits of a health retreat. So his companions suggested he attend a nearby "Vino and Van Gogh" art class, where people would show up and have their glasses filled as they sploshed cheap acrylics around. It did the trick.

"I got a brush in my hand and that was it. I fell in love. When I got back home to Los Angeles, I bought loads of oils and canvases on Amazon and just de-stressed and got stuck in. And then it went boom."

He spent the next three years vigorously pursuing his new hobby, ruining the carpets in his Redondo Bay home with powder and pigment splatters. The fruits of his endeavours – more than 150 radiant pictures, some on canvas and others drawn digitally – can be seen on his website. And this love of colour has since translated into 'The Painter', notably on tracks like 'Bank Of Wildflowers', featuring Mercury Award nominee Georgia, and on Orbit's cover of Polly Scattergood's 'Colours Colliding'.

It was the guitar that first hooked the young William Mark Wainwright. He grew up with Anglo-Italian parents in Palmers Green, North London. His working-class mum and dad had middle-class aspirations, became teachers and would only listen to classical music at home, along with the BBC Home Service – the precursor of Radio 4.

"I came from one of those homes where it was only classical – belovedly so," he says. "And I enjoyed it – it was my language of music. I can remember as a very young boy, maybe 10 years old, making up symphonies in my head when I couldn't sleep."

Years later, in 1999, he would take Barber's 'Adagio For Strings' into the UK Top 10, peaking at Number Four. The synth rendition, which he performed by ear, has become an ambient classic. Getting music into the charts is no mean feat – his parents must have been very proud, I suggest.

"No, they weren't into those things," says Orbit sheepishly. "I've got a sibling who's never uttered the name of any of the artists I've worked with or the name of the songs I've done or any award I might have won, and my parents are pretty much the same. So that's not so great."

He looks hurt when he says this.

"But hey, I made it," he adds. "I don't need their affirmation."

Yet it was his dad who inadvertently set Orbit on his way, when he gave his son an Italian guitar that he'd picked up while on national service in Yemen.

"It was designed for the ladies, you know, and he always had it in this black wooden case," recalls Orbit. "I picked it up one day and was struggling with it, and he said, 'I'll show you how to tune it'. And basically, that was it – he never got it back. It became mine."

Later, he was a Hendrix devotee and gravitated towards the electric guitar, and it's the instrument he still feels most at home with, explaining that he uses them "as synthesisers".

A second seminal moment came in 1971, when the 14-year-old William – or Mark, as he was known then – borrowed his uncle's tape recorder.

"I loved it. I could make a noise, run the tape back and play it. I was chopping it up and sticking it together, putting it backwards, recording all sorts of things. But I'd stick the tape together with Sellotape and that's not advisable, because the glue oozes out, and over time it gubbins up the works."

When he left school, Orbit didn't really know what to do with himself. So, at his mother's insistence, he initially became an office administrator. A glut of itinerant jobs followed, including working at the Heineken Brewery in Amsterdam and busking on the streets of Paris, before he found himself back in London, squatting in an old schoolhouse in Paddington. This was at the start of the boom in the North Sea oil industry.

"I managed to blag my way in as a junior draughtsman tech clerk," says Orbit. "Wow, money! I'd never had any money of my own."

At the same time, Orbit was starting out in his synthpop group Torch Song with Grant Gilbert and Laurie Mayer. Somewhat fortuitously, right next door to his squat was a second-hand shop full of musical equipment, run by two Italian gentlemen called Giuseppe and Raymondo, and he pretty much bought up their stock. The next few years were a blur of activity. Torch Song didn't set the world on fire, but Miles Copeland of IRS Records liked them enough to give them a not-insubstantial deal.

That money helped Orbit to establish a more permanent base in Little Venice, where he set up the first incarnation of his Guerilla Studios in his back garden and fitted it out with a 24-track recorder. The competitive rates prompted independent labels such as nearby Mute Records and 4AD to send over their artists to record, with Depeche Mode, Gary Numan, Cocteau Twins and Laibach just some of the names that came through the door.

In 1988, Orbit produced the novelty single 'Loadsamoney (Doin' Up The House)' by Harry Enfield. Improbably becoming his first hit, it soared up the charts but wound up in trouble, thanks to its sampling of Abba's 'Money, Money, Money'. He enjoyed hanging out with Enfield, Paul Whitehouse and Charlie Higson (you can spot Orbit on the 'Top Of The Pops' performance via YouTube), although he had enough sense to credit himself as "Billy Beat".

He scored a big hit in 1990 too, with 'Fascinating Rhythm' from his house music outfit Bass-O-Matic's first album, 'Set The Controls For The Heart Of The Bass'. Recorded for his Guerilla Records label, which he'd set up that year with DJ John Gosling and former Y Records owner Dick O'Dell, it elevated his status to that of the éminence grise of trance music during the 1990s.

Orbit's abilities were now getting him noticed by all and sundry, from Betty Boo to the inhabitants of Kling Klang. He was summoned to remix Kraftwerk's 'Radioactivity' and afterwards received a call from the man he refers to affectionately as "Ralfie".

"'Hello, this is Ralf Hütter here. I'm in London. Can I pop round?'," says Orbit, retelling the story. "He came to Crouch End on a push bike, wearing one of those suits with short trousers. I was really impressed – who wears something like that? – and we became friends."

Orbit had recently borrowed a Synclavier from Sting, but he and "Ralfie" were unable to get the thing working.

Throughout this blazing period, he was releasing numbered offerings from his 'Strange Cargo' series, which started as a sort of hodgepodge of big band muzak and didn't really hit its stride until 1993's 'Strange Cargo III', when trip hop was trending. Of one of its most successful tracks, 'Water From A Vine Leaf' featuring Beth Orton, which was remixed by Spooky and Underworld, Orbit simply says, "I found myself".

Perhaps most significantly, he was asked to remix Madonna's 'Justify My Love' that same year – a foot in the door which, five years later, led to a career-defining moment for him and a renaissance for her.

"Madonna never loses money for her label," says Orbit. "They'd been projecting five million sales or something like that for her next album, but after 'Evita', expectations were medium. And then her producer of choice terminated, and I got a call.

"At the time, I was working on 'Strange Cargo 5' and I didn't have a deal – I'm just an obsessive music maker – so I sent her what I had. She came back to me and said, 'Can I make a record with that?', and next thing you know, we're in business and we're making 'Ray Of Light'.

"On the title track, we were both showing off in the studio and I had a guitar on. It's flying all over the place, and she hits such a pinnacle of vocal excellence that at the end, she just shrieks with laughter and goes into this operatic flow, and I've got it all on tape. And she's like, 'Wow, what did I just do?'. That's the best moment with an artist, when they're shrieking with laughter because they've just excelled themselves."

'Ray Of Light' came out in early 1998, and its ubiquity knew no bounds, with Madonna even crossing over to college radio for the first time. Orbit became a man in demand, working with a host of international artists until it stopped being fun, and he retreated into himself for those eight long years.

We should also mention that 'Pure Shores', Orbit's collaboration with All Saints, would have been the best-selling single of the new millennium had it not been for Bob The Builder's 'Can We Fix It?'. The lead track for Danny Boyle's movie, 'The Beach', 'Pure Shores' was everywhere, and there were rumours that Madge was furious.

"There was a question hanging in the air," affirms Orbit. "It's 2000 and we're making her next record, 'Music', and it's like, 'Oh, 'Pure Shores' could have been one of mine, maybe?'. And it could have been. There was no plan – it just came out. I'm impulsive. I was asked by Danny Boyle to come up with a song for 'The Beach', and it had to be very oceanic. I thought of the title 'Pure Shores' and got together with Shaznay… what can I say?

"There was a certain ruefulness, but she wasn't furious. Madonna gets more furious if you're five minutes late for a session."

Orbit's appreciation of nature grew out of the murkiness he experienced several years ago when, aged 61, a first-time foray into cocaine, LSD, mushrooms, weed and MDMA culminated in a four-week involuntary stay at a psychiatric facility following a psychotic episode. His rock bottom precipitated a new outlook and, with it, finer metaphorical weather.

"I was in as dark a place as it is possible to be," he says. "But I came out of it and had a springtime and was straight into the summer, really, as has been manifested by this record."

What Orbit calls his "budding curiosity about new things" led him to do something that might feel counterintuitive – he enrolled on a Pro Tools music course online. This, don't forget, is the producer who has had a hand in around 200 million album sales, with artists like Madonna, U2, Blur and Robbie Williams.

"I'm an ace at Pro Tools, but a few things puzzled me about the new version, so that's why I signed up," he explains. "It got me going again. I gradually found my confidence coming back, and I was like, 'Oh, I can do this!'. The music started to flow, and suddenly I was on fire."

For the new album, he went on to work with artists such as Katie Melua, Beth Orton and Laurie Mayer, who he already knew well, and Georgia and Canadian-Colombian artist Lido Pimienta, who he didn't.

"Sometimes it was a wish list, and sometimes I just contacted them. Like Lido, for instance. I fell in love with her music and her persona and reached out via managers and networking. That's what you do, and I was happy to get a yes."

More unusually, 'Heshima Kwa Hukwe' is a reworking of a 1985 recording by the late Tanzanian singer Hukwe Zawose, from whose family Orbit sought and received their blessing for the project. Then there's 'Second Moon', featuring a Kenyan field recording from the 1950s, originally released by ethnomusicologist Hugh Tracey. Orbit makes a point of crediting the Beating Heart project in support of the International Library of African Music.

If attitudes have become more progressive regarding the complex issue of cultural appropriation, what else has changed in the music industry in the 40 years he's been involved in it?

"A lot," he says. "Going to studios is a luxury now."

'The Painter' was mastered at Abbey Road, but much of the recording was done right here in Orbit's flat. It's a cluttered and homely abode which, were we to try to guess who lived here, 'Through The Keyhole'-style, would suggest someone who is busy, spends most of their waking hours recording, and lives elsewhere lots of the time.

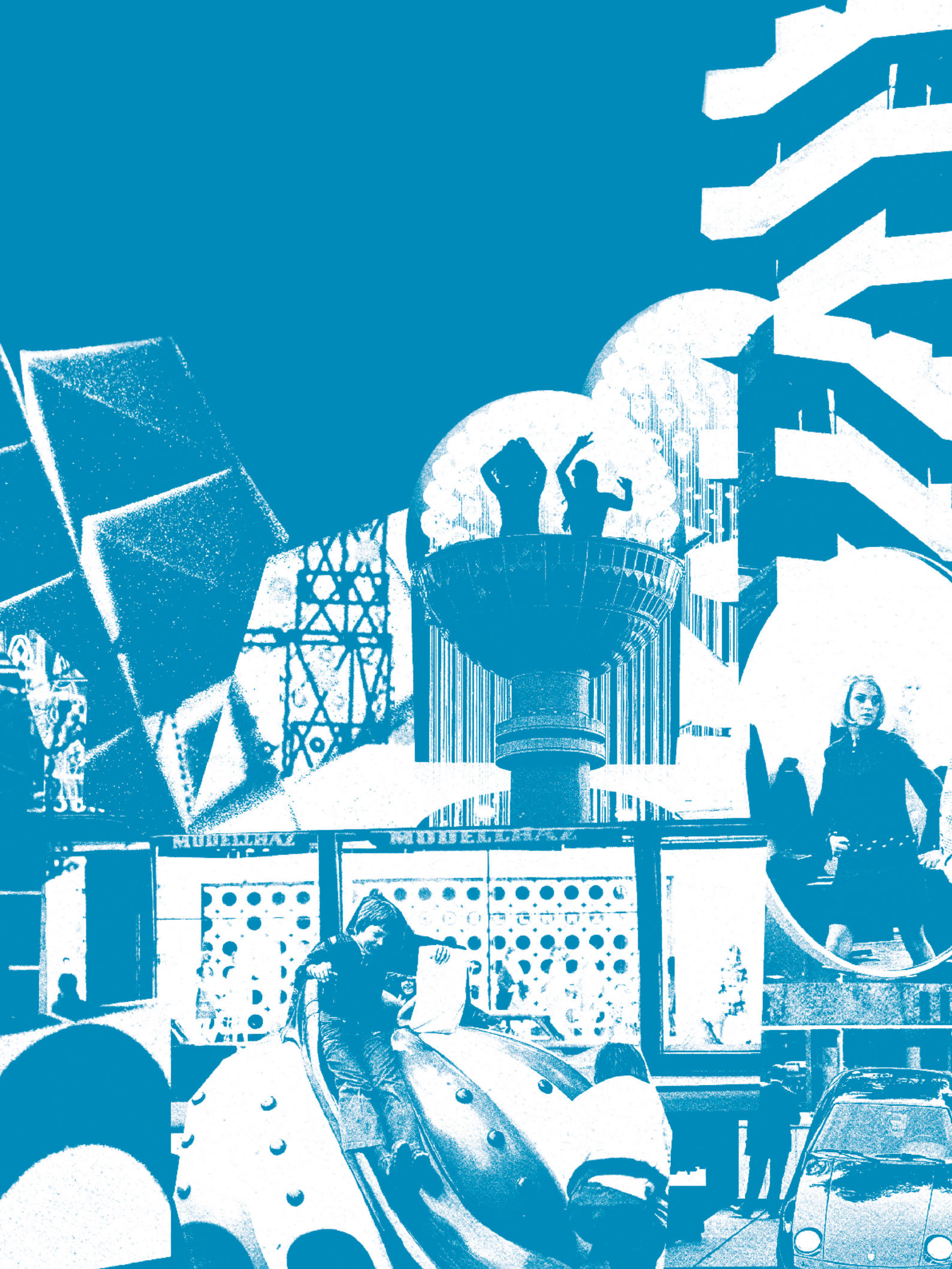
Orbit has spent the past four decades in, well, orbit, flitting between London and LA, and he's about to move to Venice for a year. After all, this is the man who once lived into a suite in a Hyde Park hotel for three years because he didn't like the decor of the "big fat house" he'd just bought in Connaught Square.

"And some things don't change," he says, returning to the peculiarities of the music business. "One of the things that's hard to do is record with a guitar around your neck. It's a big clunky thing and you kind of need to be near the mic. It can get very awkward with tech, headphones, dongles, guitar cables, and then you suddenly stand up because the phone is ringing and you get…"

He imitates the sound of a guitar being yanked out of its socket.

"That never changes. But everything else is radically different."

'The Painter' is out now on Warner



IN THE ROUND

Cate Brooks is The Advisory Circle, and the retro synths of latest album 'Full Circle' hark back to her earliest days on Ghost Box. In a rare and candid interview, she admits it's been "a hell of a journey" to get there

WORDS: BOB FISCHER

"To be honest, I thought I'd given up doing interviews…" says Cate Brooks.

To be equally frank, Cate, we thought you had as well. Throughout a 20-year career of affecting and emotionally charged electronica, she's always been the most elusive and enigmatic of artists. There are no publicity photos, no live sets, no podcast appearances, a skeletal social media presence and barely a word said in print since the turn of the 2010s. It's all in the music and her stalwart residencies with two monolithic labels. On Ghost Box, she is The Advisory Circle. Stranded amid the faded daydreams and utopian visions of her 1970s childhood, she hides from 'The Spirit Of Dark And Lonely Water' in a pebble-dashed bungalow with an avocado bathroom suite. For Clay Pipe Music, meanwhile, she makes solo albums with a more organic connection to place, from the Somerset soundscapes of 'Shapwick', subsumed by radiophonics and the tinkles of sinister music boxes, to the immersive sweeps of 'Maritime', filled with the lonely beauty of the shipping forecast and the Suffolk coastline.

Yet here she is, charmingly candid company on a Friday afternoon. We talk for almost an hour-and-a-half, starting with the new album, 'Full Circle'. If it's Ghost Box, it must be The Advisory Circle, with a beautiful collection of melodic instrumentals split into four distinct parts and clearly harking back to the label's formative years.

"I was listening to a lot of De Wolfe and KPM library music," says Cate. "Many of those records, especially in the late 1960s, had different suites – there would be the 'Power Suite' or the 'Construction Suite' – so some of that feeling came in. A lot of it was orchestral, so although the music I was making was synth-based, I think I was quite ambitious in terms of the arrangements.

"And I was wondering how I could take The Advisory Circle concept back to where I started. These days it's less about Public Information Films and Schools TV, but I wanted to revisit some of those early sounds and textures. So 'Full Circle' was me thinking about the roots of the whole project. My last couple of albums have been well received, but I think I'd lost a bit of how I felt when I first started. I wanted to reconnect with those initial feelings but in a new way, because I don't want to make the same records twice."

It's almost 20 years since Jim Jupp and Julian House formed Ghost Box to release their own music, recording as Belbury Poly and The Focus Group respectively. Cate – already established as King Of Woolworths – was their first recruit, and that opening salvo of releases still crackles with a visceral fizz. This isn't wistful, warm-hearted nostalgia. It's almost *angry* – the sound of a generation whose lives have been scarred by the Central Office Of Information and the residual trauma of worrying, as darkness descends on damp December afternoons, about the spectres lurking in the cubicles of school toilets.

"I still remember the week I first heard about Ghost Box," recalls Cate. "Before they'd even released anything, a friend of mine – Jon Tye from Lo Recordings – sent me a link to a beta website that Julian had put together. He said, 'My friend is starting a record label and I think you'd like it'. So I got in touch with them, and Jim sent me a few songs from his first album, 'The Willows'. I remember standing in Mansfield bus station – the worst bus station in the world – on the way to visit my mum, playing them on my headphones and thinking, 'This is amazing… I want to be part of it'.

"And we were selling our house when I made the first Advisory Circle EP, 'Mind How You Go'. So I took a couple of synths over to the in-laws, who gave me their kitchen to work in. I remember next door's cat coming in a lot. And when I listen to it now, I can see those images. Even how the weather was – quite warm, but really wet. All this random shit that wouldn't mean anything to anyone else.

"Although my life now is totally different to how it was then. For obvious reasons."

She doesn't want the subject, she says, to be "the elephant in the room". Until last year, in public at least, Cate was Jon – an outwardly male artist in a musical field awash with Y chromosomes. In August 2021, she put a life-changing post on Instagram: "My close friends and family now know me as Cate. My pronouns are she/her. Life is too short to be someone we're just not."

A nerve-racking day, I'm guessing?

"Oh God, of course it was!" she laughs. "But it had got to the point where I was feeling disingenuous, and I don't like being dishonest with anyone – even if I don't know them. I'd been doing The Advisory Circle for a long time and it almost felt like I was betraying myself. I was being steered towards a certain image, which never felt right to me. So on the day I came out to everyone, a huge weight was lifted. It was me saying, 'This is authenticity. This is me being honest about where my life is and who I am'. It wasn't up for discussion, and I think people picked up on that. And from what I know, they were honoured to be treated with the honesty they deserved. Which was really lovely for me."

When did she first begin to question her birth gender?

"I was about five. Certainly pre-school. But the world was very different then, so it was kind of suppressed. There was no support and people weren't clued up. It's better now, I'm pleased to say. I've been with my partner for over 20 years and it wasn't a shock to her. My family are wonderful. And the reason I can deal with this and be so confident is because they just didn't have a problem with it. I told my partner from the first week we got together that there were some gender identity issues going on, and she's always been really encouraging. She just wants me to be happy.

"So I'm proud of finding the strength to make the change. And hopefully it might also make people think a little bit. I might be the first transgender person they know. And I'm not an activist – that's just not my way – but from what I've been told, I've made certain family members challenge their own thoughts and how they perceive gender issues. And that's really cool. It's a quiet activism, really."

And does making music as Cate feel different to making music as Jon? She pauses for thought.

"If anything, I'm able to express my emotions more and put them into context," she says. "I was doing the same before, because music was an outlet I didn't have in real life. But it feels better now. The first thing I released as Cate was a Bandcamp album called 'Chalk Sketches' in February. It was very stripped back, mainly piano and organ, and it was very cathartic to do."

I've listened to 'Chalk Sketches' on lone, late-night dog walks through my local woods – the perfect setting for a back catalogue steeped in the crepuscular. Vintage synths, fizzling field recordings, upright school pianos… Cate Brooks' albums combine musical eclecticism with a distinctly sombre stillness. It's the result of a decidedly bittersweet childhood.

"My dad, Jack Brooks, was a professional jazz player," she reveals. "A guitarist, mainly. He played with some quite prestigious artists – people like Johnny Dankworth and Tubby Hayes. I grew up near Oxford, and in the home counties all the jazzers know each other, so everyone was round our house at the weekends. Dad was never pushy, but he figured I really liked instruments and recordings. So when I was four, he gave me a cassette recorder and I started to make tapes. I remember one of my dad's friends, a jazz drummer, turning up and hearing me play a half-sized drum kit. And he said, 'You know what? He's better than some of the drummers I've had in my band!'

"Jazz was a huge thing for me, and still is. But so was what was happening in the charts, because I've always loved pop music too. I really liked Robin Scott – M., Roxy Music and Blondie. 'Heart Of Glass' was probably one of the first times I started to think about synths. It blew my mind."

Synaesthesia played a part too. Since childhood, Cate has "seen" music as colours and shapes.

"When I was a kid, 'Sugar, Sugar' by The Archies was still a popular song on Radio 2," she recalls. "And the main melody in that song – played on a fuzzy marimba with distortion – produced the most intense green lozenge shape in my brain.

WOOLWORTHS

"So music gave me a real boost, and my dad was my best friend. He was so cool, and I loved him, but he died when I was nine. After that, I went into my own world. I was very solitary, quite an unhappy kid. You know some kids go to the bottom of the garden and build castles? I took my tape recorder out to record sounds, then listened back to them and made collages. I got lost in a whole world of recording."

That immersion, I suggest, is a defining characteristic of introverted kids. When 1980s episodes of 'Doctor Who' ended, I would immediately write down the plot so I could revisit it all in my bedroom later, obsessing over the tiny details – the little things in life that made me happy.

"I'll tell you a funny story," she says. "This morning, my other half was talking about Bernard Cribbins, and I said, 'When I had a train set as a kid, it came with a flexi disc'. And I remembered it was Bernard Cribbins talking about being two inches tall and getting squashed by a Pekinese. So I went on YouTube, found it, and I was word-perfect! I haven't heard it since I was about six.

"Because sweet and sour things happened throughout my childhood, it made me want to bubble-wrap the nice things. I loved my gran and spending time with her, so my album '52' was about her house. And my dad… those memories are so precious. Obviously we didn't have ways of documenting them at the time. There were no digital phones or cameras. But those things had to be preserved somehow, and our brains are very good at holding onto the things we want them to."

A sense of yearning nostalgia comes over strongly in the music, I tell her. It reaches out across the decades, a lonely 1970s kid putting an arm around the shoulders of troubled 21st century adults. Her music has helped me through some very, very difficult times. 'Shapwick', in particular, is an album I associate entirely with the positive recovery from serious mental turmoil. God, it's partly *responsible* for that recovery. Cate seems touched.

"That's what life should be – doing good things for other people," she says. "It doesn't matter what you've lived through. If that stuff comes out in the art you make, then you're turning it into a positive and that counteracts the pain you've had.

"I'm really glad it helped you. If I wasn't a musician, I'd be a therapist. And I've been through therapy twice. I think you can heal through music, and that's a huge thing for me. To offer just an arm of support, even though it's not personal. If you can do that, isn't that an amazing thing?"

Had she been aware, I wonder, of her reputation as an enigma?

"It's something I've been told, but I've never really thought about it," she says. "I don't jump up and down and try to make myself more popular. I'm more about making the music and letting that speak for itself. I suppose it has given me a bit of mystery, but it's never been engineered."

Nevertheless, that 2021 transition marked a turning point in Cate's social life.

"Even before lockdown, I was avoiding being sociable," she recalls. "To the point where people who knew me would say, 'Oh well, they're just shy or socially awkward'. But no, that's not the way it is. When I came out to my family, we started going out again, and the whole world felt very different. Any excuse now to get together for a party… I'm there. Being born the wrong gender and knowing it from a very early age, causes a lot of problems. It makes you very withdrawn, and you internalise things.

"Going to family weddings, for example. In my previous life, I'd be expected to turn up in a suit and do the whole masculine thing. Which is fine if that's what you do, but it always felt dreadful to me. I wanted to be in the fanciest frock going. I love my clothes, especially vintage stuff, so it was really getting me down. But in May this year, I went to the first wedding I've ever really enjoyed in my life. I had the best time! It's made such a massive difference."

It's been a privilege talking, I tell her. I hadn't known at all what to expect from the interview, and I would have been happy with a gentle, round-the-houses chat about 'Full Circle'. But I can't thank her enough for opening up in this way. It's been an education and an honour. Cate modestly accepts the compliment.

"It's life," she says. "You just have to experience things, and they make you stronger. I'm very resilient, and a lot of that goes into my music. People say, 'Your music is really emotional'. Well, I wonder why? But I wouldn't change anything. It's been a hell of a journey."

'Full Circle' is out now on Ghost Box

DEVIL'S ADVOCATE

PHOTO: TIILLY MORRIS

Ex-Factory Floor man Gabe Gurnsey is back with his second solo effort, 'Diablo'. Featuring his girlfriend Tilly Morris as both muse and singer, it's a pulsating, dancefloor-centric banger teeming with hedonistic abandon, aching desire and a wicked after-dark edge

WORDS: FAT ROLAND

This is perhaps the first piece for Electronic Sound to encompass cigarettes, blancmange, casseroles and bagpipes. Admittedly, most of that is journalistic bluster, but why let facts get in the way of a good tale? Today's story is about the creation of Gabe Gurnsey's second album, 'Diablo'.

His previous long-player, 2018's solo debut 'Physical' – which saw him branching out alone from his cool-as-heck Factory Floor outfit – was marketed as "an imaginary soundtrack to a night out". 'Diablo', meanwhile, appears to be a soundtrack to an imaginary night out, a subtle but key difference that marks a significant step forward for the producer.

Flipping the desk calendar back a few pages, during the 2010s, Gabe Gurnsey found success with Nik Colk Void as the drummer for ice-cold electronic body-poppers Factory Floor. Their two studio albums, 2013's 'Factory Floor' and 2016's '25 25', were a Haçienda fever dream – modern EBM complete with throbbing veins and straining cartilage. The press went wild, likening their sound to Joy Division, Nico and Larry Heard. To cement their reputation, New Order's Stephen Morris came on board as a producer.

And then in 2018, Gurnsey went solo. Let's not get into the history of drummers venturing alone, because that means thinking about Phil Collins, and no one wants to think about Phil Collins. Gurnsey's debut, 'Physical', was a looser sound than his group work, described in these very pages as "not so much a factory floor as the staff refectory, complete with ping-pong table and a bowl of Benzedrine". And yes, Phil Collins was referred to in that review too. We really need to get away from the Phil Collins thing.

"Before 'Physical', I'd not released any solo stuff, so it's been a learning curve," explains Gurnsey, lighting a cigarette. "But I need to keep producing stuff. Keep going."

He's relaxed and jokey when I talk to him, but putting out 'Diablo' was clearly a massive stress release.

"I was almost crying when I announced it," he admits. "The frustration of the last two years has been mad. You over-listen to stuff, and you end up thinking it's a miserable fucking pile of shit. I was quite overwhelmed by the reaction from people. It feels great, man."

'Diablo' is a fabulous listen. The bouncy bass of lead single 'Push' is an instant win. It's surrounded by oodles of acidic disco and drugged-out electro trips to keep any party going until the break of dawn, or at least until the last bus home. There are notes of Neu!, Suicide, New Order and Working Men's Club. All the while, the lyrics – "proper clubby lyrics", as Gurnsey describes them – insist on bringing the heat, getting on the dancefloor, giving someone their love and other, similar youthful shenanigans.

"I remember my brother bringing back mixtapes when I was a kid," he reflects. "They were full of that kind of stuff."

'Diablo' is Gurnsey at his most joyous. We've gone from the factory floor via the staff refectory to a rave in a roof garden. Yet this was originally going to be a very different work.

A couple of years ago, 'Physical' had left Gurnsey energised. He'd torn through the festival circuit, playing glamorous locations, such as Chicago and Cheshire. He'd shared the stage with Doves, Nine Inch Nails and The Jesus And Mary Chain, and made Best Album lists along the way. (Cue a 'Rocky'-type montage of Gurnsey doing synth-powered workouts in the studio while looking really pleased with himself.) So it made sense that the follow-up to 'Physical' would be a collection of club stormers inspired by the vitality of live crowds. Four-to-the-floor and then some more.

"And then the pandemic fucking hit," he says.

Live gigs shut up shop, and his plans for album number two scaled down dramatically. Instead, Gurnsey decided to produce a sister record to 'Physical' with a mellower soundtrack vibe. Think MGMT going off on one with 'Congratulations' or Moby suddenly going ambient – a reflection of the strung-out days of lockdown.

"I had about 10 tunes," he says. "They didn't have any drums or vocals on."

But the memory of pre-pandemic gigging lingered, and this was clearly a man with a gig-shaped hole to fill.

"I had a lust for it. Being immersed in going out and having a good time, just dancing, with no one speaking."

He even remembers the moment when his soundtrack idea withered away. He was playing an early version of 'Push' to a crowded room at a festival in France. The track didn't yet have its signature vocal hooks ("Let's push! Together!"). In fact, he was pretty much writing it on the fly.

"The set was going sweet, then the bassline kicked in," he recalls. "Just the kick and the bass went down really well. That secured the direction of the album for me."

The new chilled-out direction didn't gel. He returned to the original plan – four-to-the-floor dance tunes, albeit with a Gurnsey twist.

Yes, this is a solo outing. Gabe Gurnsey's name stands alone. A fine name it is too – he sounds like an archangel from the Channel Islands. But there's a key member of personnel we haven't talked about yet – his partner, Tilly Morris. As with 'Physical', her vocals feature throughout. This time, even more so. Gurnsey worked-up rhythms in the studio, then set up a mic to allow

Morris to mumble half-melodies – sometimes pulling back, sometimes over-doing it, with a lot of trial and error and re-recording – until they coalesced into something outstanding.

"After I decided it wasn't going to be a mellow soundtrack, Tilly took the reins," says Gurnsey. "I wanted her to dominate the record. She did a massive part of the writing, so it's a collaborative album in a lot of ways."

There's a real pop sensibility to her vocals. The pair of them duetting on 'Hey Diablo' is ever-so-disco. The layered lines in 'Give Me' present themselves as psychedelic folk euphoria, albeit drenched in analogue synth work. And if you squint your ears, the uttered narrative on the drumless 'I Love A Sea On Fire' could be slow-motion crowd hype.

"I wanted to get a pop element in there," says Gurnsey. "Some of the vocal processing in pop music is incredible, like Lady Gaga, for example, or Charli XCX. The production is insane. Tilly's a big influence on that side of things, of course."

The artwork on 'Diablo' boasts a particularly memorable visual aesthetic. You could recreate it at home if you wanted to. Get your nearest television. Turn the saturation to maximum. Now smash your head into the screen. Result – you are Gabe 2.0! The cover has Morris' face illuminated in nuclear pink, her dark hair a violent blood magenta, eyes glowing as if possessed by an exploding blancmange. The 'Hey Diablo' track is accompanied by a video that bursts with purple and pink hyper-colours, its visual frame glitching out of shape with frantic energy. Even the records are made from neon vinyl. It's a far cry from the functional geometry of Factory Floor's artwork.

"That visualiser went through a thousand versions," says Gurnsey of the 'Hey Diablo' video. "It was doing my head in. It's tricky to get the aesthetic of the track you're working with, but it all fitted together nicely. And there's definitely a bit of a devilish look in Tilly's eyes on the cover."

Incidentally, let's get the devil out of the way. 'Diablo'. Part of speech: noun. Definition: "devil". Taken from Spanish, which in turn was derived from the Latin word "diabolus". Not to be confused with "diable", which is a casserole dish. Unfortunately for a journalist continually digging for metaphors, I'm sad to report there isn't much to be derived from any religious meaning. This isn't Enigma and their sexy monks.

"I wrote 'Hey Diablo', so then I thought, 'I'll call the album 'Hey Diablo'," says Gurnsey, although he chopped off the "Hey" to make the title a little more pithy.

"There is a lot of sex and lust on the record in terms of the lyrics," he concedes. "I like the idea of being led astray and feeling comfortable with that. So there's a few devilish ideas in there!"

Please don't think about Phil Collins during this next bit. Since the, er, genesis of Factory Floor, Gurnsey has been billed as a drummer. His brief has been wider than that in practice, but 'Diablo' is notable for being his first album as a non-drummer. An ex-drummer. The drummer is a dead parrot. He's put down his sticks and is pining for the fjords. The album, he says, "didn't really need it".

Instead, drum machines now dominate his sound. 'Diablo' is packed with the metronomic kinesis you only get from letting the diodes flash until there's smoke coming out. Although, on 'Higher Estates' there are real bongos, which he dropped into a MIDI track, and to keep a connection to his previous album, there's a load of samples from the very drummy 'Physical' that he shoved into the sequencer of his Elektron Digitakt drum machine.

"It's just endless what you can do with stuff now," he says with genuine wonder. He's excited about the LinnDrum kicks, and he credits his mixer and label boss Erol Alkan with some especially delightful hi-hats. He and I both get excited about the ricocheting 909 claps on the album track 'Blessings'.

"I love claps," he says. "The track I'm working on at the moment has about four going at the same time. They're bloody panned all over the place. That's probably not the best way to do it, but it's fun."

Gurnsey is delightfully deprecating when it comes to the equipment he uses to make music, despite clear evidence that he knows his way around a studio like the back of his knob-twiddling hand. Take his Bitwig, for example. This is not, as you might expect, a hairstyle popular with cryptocurrency bros. Bitwig Studio is a digital audio workstation used by the likes of Richie Hawtin.

"Everyone asks me what I use. I say Bitwig and everyone goes, 'What the fuck is that?'. I've been using it for years."

He talks about oscillators and modulation before moving on to his Roland JD-XA – "one of the big new bloody ugly ones". He loves its choir sound but tends to steer clear of some of the presets.

"I try to avoid the bagpipes one," he says, before we both decide that he definitely needs to use the bagpipes one.

Another thing to be avoided was social media, especially during lockdown. Which was a shame because Gurnsey's tweets are entertaining.

"Heading into the studio with a 'Live Laugh Love' poster and a bottle of vodka. See what comes," says one tweet. "Heading into the studio with a pack of Tuc Cheese Sandwiches and an open mind. See what comes," says another. You get the idea. It was funny at the time.

"I totally dropped off Twitter – it was doing my head in," he admits. "There's just too much fucking information, so I focused on being in the studio a lot more."

Let's put the desk calendar away and look at the bigger picture. In terms of studio album count, Gabe Gurnsey's career is now as long as Factory Floor's. That's if you don't include Factory Floor's 2018 live score to Fritz Lang's 'Metropolis', which we probably should (though, as was said earlier, why let facts get in the way of a good tale).

So, given that Nik Colk Void has been busy launching her own solo career, will Factory Floor be back any time soon? Gurnsey reveals that there have been rumours of a FF reunion. Sort of.

"Well, Nik said in The Guardian that we'd re-form, so we'll see," he clarifies. "She's totally done her thing, I've done my own thing, and it would be cool to see how we merged. We'll get back into it at some time in the future."

For the time being, though, Gurnsey's focus is on producing with other people, including working with Stephen Morris on a remix of Neu!'s signature 'Hallogallo'.

"Steve's brilliant, as always – synth and drum machine king."

And, as his solo work has opened up all sorts of new possibilities, the future might well be pop for Gurnsey. As well as producing "Manny on the rise" rapper OneDa for Heavenly Recordings, he's also hooked up with London singer Rose Gray – an artist who has been hyped by the likes of Radio 1, NTS and Popjustice – and soon he'll be collaborating with Oxford avant-popster Julia-Sophie too.

"I want to move in a more pop style of production," says Gurnsey. "I want to keep learning – that's what I buzz off."

We've had cigarettes and blancmange and casseroles and bagpipes. Against all odds, Gabe Gurnsey has emerged victorious from his suss-studio to live another day in paradise. Sorry, that's way too much Phil Collins.

But seriously, Gurnsey is already planning more reworks of 'Diablo' tracks. Even as we speak, he has his sights set on 'I Love A Sea On Fire' – the one with the slow motion crowd hype.

"I'd love to whack a 4/4 kick on that," he grins. "Just make it absolutely disgraceful for a club."

Four-to-the-floor? He knows the score.

'Diablo' is out now on Phantasy Sound

HEAVY HEAVY MONSTER SOUND

With experimental noisenik Blanck Mass now fully ensconced in the ranks, Editors have gone bigger, deeper and darker into electro-industrial territory on their thrilling new long-player, 'EBM'. Prepare to have your face melted...

WORDS: JEREMY ALLEN
PICTURES: RAHI REZVANI

Twenty years after they first formed at Staffordshire University, Editors are entering a fascinating new phase in their career. The latest regeneration comes exactly 10 years after the last one, when new musicians Justin Lockey and Elliott Williams were recruited following the acrimonious departure of guitarist Chris Urbanowicz.

There has been no such painful schism this time, but Editors are now officially a six-piece. Back in April, it was announced that electro-industrial drone merchant Benjamin John Power – aka Blanck Mass – was coming on board full-time, coinciding with the release of 'Heart Attack', a pulsating new single with a goth underbelly. Having worked with the band on and off for the last five years, he brings a fresh electronic impetus to a group who were already leaning boldly in that direction.

Editors' latest album, 'EBM', is a brilliant play on the artists' combined initials and the 1980s music genre, evoking Belgian outfits like Front 242 and à;GRUMH, Germany's DAF and the UK's Nitzer Ebb.

On the face of it, the addition of Blanck Mass to the line-up might look as bonkers as Johnny Marr joining The Cribs or Modest Mouse, or David Bowie forming Tin Machine, but as will become clear, it makes perfect sense in the development of this ever-evolving group. Based in Birmingham in the early days, Editors are now spread out across the country, coming together in Bristol to rehearse for their European tour.

"Obviously, we've been going for 10 years with this line-up," says frontman Tom Smith. "We've made three records with Elliott and Justin, so this is the beginning of the third chapter now with Ben."

He describes 2012 as "a funny year of highs and lows". It was the year the group, whose original line-up comprised Smith, Urbanowicz, Russell Leetch and Ed Lay, tore itself apart.

"The end of 2011 and the beginning of 2012 were pretty shit. I can't remember the exact timeline, but when we parted ways with Chris it was the end of 2011. We'd been trying to make our fourth record with producer Flood, and he said it was one of the hardest things he's ever had to do in music. It just became darker and darker.

"We didn't get to the end. We made the dramatic decision and then moved on without Chris. So yeah, it was grim."

They eventually released a fairly straight rock record, 2013's 'The Weight Of Your Love' – made with Nashville-based producer Jacquire King – although that now looks like a pitstop on a progressive electronic journey. Perhaps more important was a pre-booked date at the Rock Werchter festival in Belgium at the end of June 2012, the biggest show they'd ever played up to that point.

"Initially, we weren't going to do it," says Smith. "We were just going to take a year off and soul-search or whatever, but we decided to give it a go with the help of Justin and Elliott. And then the year was geared around trying to get together to make Werchter happen."

The new line-up was received by 80,000 enthusiastic fans in a show that was, in Smith's words, "incredible". And it represented the moment where the group would begin to receive more acclaim outside of Britain than in it.

"We still do OK in the UK, although our relevance as a band kind of stopped there," he says with a shrug. "But in mainland Europe, we were really taken to heart. It kind of marks the point where Europe became a lot more significant than the UK for us, certainly regarding our cultural relevance. From then on, our place on the radar and in the press at home definitely took a step down. But in Europe, it exploded."

Some 27 days after Editors played Rock Werchter, Blanck Mass was enjoying his own moment in the sun. His band, Fuck Buttons, a niche but well-loved duo from Bristol, were suddenly being seen by 900 million viewers around the world via the opening ceremony of the 2012 Summer Olympics in London. The director of the spectacle, Oscar-winner Danny Boyle, had given his musical directors Underworld a simple brief: "Frighten people".

It must have been a life-changing moment, I suggest to Power, who's speaking to me from Edinburgh.

"Yeah, yeah," he replies. "My mum took me seriously for a second."

The inclusion of Fuck Buttons grabbed headlines, especially as their 2009 single, 'Surf Solar', came so early and prominently in the proceedings. For Power personally, though, Blanck Mass' 'Sundowner', augmented by none other than the London Symphony Orchestra, was the pinnacle. He felt it augured well.

"It did seem very strange that something which had started off as a kind of pure noise project could end up in a place like the Olympics' opening ceremony," he says. "But I think more interesting for me was the Blanck Mass involvement. These were songs I had written in my tiny flat in Dalston. I didn't have a connection with any kind of orchestra. I'd envisaged this record as orchestral pieces, but I didn't have the means to actualise it. I tried my best to replicate it electronically, but not with a sample pack – more in an experimental solo orchestral way, if that makes sense. And then seeing it performed by the London Symphony Orchestra gave me a bit of hope for the future of my career. It was huge, and I was really just a kid."

While both Editors and Blanck Mass have gone from strength to strength since 2012, collectively and now together, it could be argued that the country responsible for the coolest opening ceremony ever – unquestionably so from a musical point of view – has since gone to the dogs. Ten years later, we're all in a very different place.

Now that both outfits have merged, Editors' radical change of direction must have disturbed some of the original fanbase. Take the Phase Fatale remix of 'Heart Attack' with a Felix Geen-assisted AI video – definitely not one for the faint-hearted. You could say it's a long way from their 2005 single, 'Munich', although Smith gleefully reports that in Germany, fans prefer it when they bring the techno.

Much of the self-congratulatory spirit of 2012 – when Britain basked in the glow of the international spotlight – was wrecked by the divisive EU referendum four years later. Some of the lyrics on 'EBM' reflect that change, such as the line, "Can you feel the broken nation?" on 'Strawberry Lemonade', or the refrain, "Don't educate" on 'Educate'. Is 'EBM' a more political record than previous offerings?

"There are a few lines aimed at post-Brexit Britain and the frustration of it," says Smith. "You've said the country has gone to shit, and I agree with you. It's a pretty awful place out there and has been for years. So there is a little bit of anger in that direction, absolutely.

"I think with any kind of creative endeavour at the moment, it's difficult not to be at least a bit politically motivated," adds Power. "It takes over a great deal of our collective psyche and it's very difficult to separate the two. When I first started making music, it seemed like a much more carefree place to be. That's probably very easy for somebody like me to say – at the time, I was young. Now, it's much harder to get away from external politics. It's an all-encompassing part of being a human being today."

While there might be a little bit of politics, 'EBM' is more a record that represents escapism, and there's a visceral yearning in the music that can be explained by the two years we've all just been through.

The title was originally intended for another big Editors show in 2020. The group had been booked to play a large festival in Europe and were to perform two sets, including what Smith describes as a "one-off bespoke evening" – a nighttime extravaganza where much of their recognised back catalogue would be reworked with the dancefloor in mind.

It made sense to call upon Blanck Mass, who'd provided a creative pulse to their 2018 album 'Violence', produced by Leo Abrahams. They'd then worked together again more overtly in 2019 on 'The Blanck Mass Sessions', which was a reworking of the 'Violence' tracks, plus 'Barricades' – the first song the two artists did together.

The festival never happened, becoming another casualty of the pandemic. But what had started as a reworking exercise bore new tunes. Power threw himself into his work, addressing grief on the deeply personal sound tapestry that would become 2021's 'In Ferneaux', as well as scoring a couple of TV series.

In this maelstrom of productivity, he was also sending song ideas to the band electronically. Until then, he'd either written alone or as Fuck Buttons, where he and Andrew Hung would do everything in a room together.

"That process worked between me and Andy because there were only two of us, and there wasn't really a set role for either of us," says Power. "With Editors, it's a band and people have more defined roles, so it's less drama if you can home in on what your role is."

Working remotely was strange for everybody, and Power says, "We all just kind of gritted our teeth and got on with it".

For Smith, it was stranger still.

"On every record up to this point, all of the songs started with me," he says. "Either sitting at the piano or with an acoustic guitar. With this, I'm being served up musical demos with the chords and a lot of the key melodies already there. So my job now is probably more decoration, and finding a way to make my voice work in a completely different way to how it normally would.

"It was fun, but it was very unlike any other Editors record. It made me more playful in how I used my voice to make it work with the electronica."

Belgian techno is a clear inspiration, and other well-known influences make it into the mix too, especially the twangy guitar on the outro of the excellent 'Kiss'.

"I'd be lying if I said I wasn't a Depeche Mode fan, and I think that goes for everybody in the band," says Power. "I'm sure a bit of that creeps in just because of your taste. It wasn't a conscious decision to try to do something in that vein. It was more just that we find ourselves in a position to be able to experiment and basically do whatever the fuck we like."

"We did three or four festivals with The Cure a few years ago, and Justin is definitely using his chorus pedal more now," jokes Smith. "If you canvassed casual opinion among Editors fans about what Ben brings to the table, there'd be an assumption that he brings the ugly, and it's so not true.

"Don't get me wrong, he does do that, but so much melody comes from him as well. So it really isn't the way people think it is at all. I'd be interested to hear what they assume the process was versus what the reality is."

Power originally met Editors through Justin Lockey when they both played in the Mogwai-affiliated supergroup, Minor Victories. He counts himself as an Editors fan and struck up strong friendships with members of the group, which often ended up in blowouts in Edinburgh.

Power admits he had an inclination that they might ask him to join them eventually, though he had concerns about the group's size rather than any suggestion that they couldn't meld musically.

"It's a little bit intimidating, if I'm being quite honest," admits Power. "It's such a well-oiled machine and they play in front of thousands of people all the time, doing these huge, huge shows. But I wasn't privy to the conversations the boys must have had about whether they wanted to bring in the weirdo or not."

Smith says Editors were listening to the Blanck Mass album 'World Eater' before they made 'Violence', and could hear the musical overlap back then. Power fits right in both as a friend and collaborator, and his inclusion is a logical development that looks set to bear plenty more fruit in the future.

"'World Eater' is obviously quite confrontational and full-on, but there are pockets of melody that just made utter sense to me," enthuses Smith. "Even back then, listening to these kinds of records – which are obviously instrumental for the most part and I guess are less accessible than Editors' – I could hear the potential of future years coming together. It's cool that it continues to develop and progress."

'EBM' is out now on Play It Again Sam

TV SPECIAL

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"My progress has been fitful," Cathal Coughlan once said of his career. In the Irish songwriter's life, there were certainly "anti-career" moments. His original band Microdisney supported David Bowie in concert then immediately split up. He shoved a Virgin Mary souvenir up his backside in a typically riotous performance with The Fatima Mansions. And as Bubonique, he recorded an album called 'Trance Arse Volume 3' with the comedian Sean Hughes. Now that's a career.

A year ago, Coughlan teamed up with seasoned producer Jacknife Lee to give us Telefís. Their first album, 'a hAon', distilled Irish pop culture through ballsy electropop. Always with a glint in its eye too, on track titles like 'Archbishop Beardmouth At The ChemOlympics' and 'Sex Bunting'. What a hammer blow to lose Coughlan to a long illness just a couple of months after that debut's release. "Cathal's dying was always a part of these songs," says Lee of this follow-up album.

'a Dó' begins with the same incantation as the first album, 'Seo É Glór Na Teilifíse' ('This Is The Voice Of Television'). Coughlan's voice is indeed characterful enough for broadcast, almost like a cartoon narrator. The spirit of the Flash animation series 'Weebl And Bob' is alive and well. On 'Swinging At The Hypnodrome', Coughlan tells a tale of a live performance that sounds several degrees of wrong. The song's mythical gig is brilliantly teased at the start of the track, quickly ambushed by a farty bass stomp. 'Hare Coursing In Mayfair' has a colourful narrative about what might be urban looting or a high street safari hunt. The storytelling is tantalising and surreal, a sort of 'Jacknife-anory With Cathal'.

The partnership between Coughlan and Lee is such a creative cauldron, the introduction of guest musicians seasons the mix rather than changes the flavour altogether. Sean O'Hagan, an old Microdisney mate and contributor to Coughlan's last solo album, joins them on the surprisingly summery pop anthem 'Space Is Us'. Its rhyming dictionary verses are a delight – I've never heard "Sauron's Eye" matched with "decentralised" before. Manc legends A Certain Ratio, meanwhile, are deployed on 'Stock Photo Guy'. The track is whispery and anxious, its subterranean boogie of a bassline ratcheted taut by tremulous brass.

Echo & The Bunnymen's Will Sergeant turns up on 'The Age Of Cling'. This album highlight sees a low-burning candle of a beat flare into a glorious pub lock-in singalong. "Sing, sing! Whistle and grin!" declare the lyrics. "Try not to think of the peril you're in!" Beer flows as the world burns. Easily done when the electro groove is so irresistible.

The least surprising guest musician is Jah Wobble. Not a criticism. It's just that there's so much delicious bass on 'a Dó' that by the time the PiL plucker makes his cameo on piratical folk anthem 'Circling Over Shannon', it feels less like a guest turn and more like a summoning of the most obvious spirit ever. With the occasional drunken diversion, it's the album's most boisterous track. A slurred line states its inspiration as the late Irish country music legend "Big" Tom McBride.

A personal highlight is 'Strawboy Supernova', in which squirrelly bass beds the story of its titular boys "cruising Ibiza, clad in their organic kit… gobbling pills like sultanas". Extra points for deftly rhyming "car" with "Ford Anglia". It's a post-punk strut with revved-up repetition, and how I would have loved to have seen Coughlan do this live.

With the greatest of respect to Jacknife Lee, whose technical flair and sparky electronics make both Telefís albums fly, the focus on 'a Dó' is squarely on Coughlan, with the softest moments saved for the second half. 'Feed The Light' finds him in tentative crooner mode, cushioned by warm strings. On this and the closing 'On A Country Road', he sounds as Nick-Cave-ish as he ever does, his voice clad in funereal black. But don't be misled – these more contemplative moments are no schmaltzy goodbye.

At their heart, Telefís are bold and daft. What a tease to place the haunting 'We See Showbands', a close-mic visionary interlude, next to the Numan-esque synths of 'The Carthaginians', complete with showy backing vocals reminiscent of the atmospheric chorus work on 'Ballytransnational' from 'a hAon'. To produce these textural variations with such ease is testament to a partnership that will be sorely missed.

From Virgin Mary souvenirs to this. If Coughlan has had an anti-career of fitful progress (he hasn't), this album isn't playing by the rules. His and Lee's collaborative swansong is a boisterous lock-in, and we're not leaving just yet.

FAT ROLAND

TELEFÍS

TSHA
Capricorn Sun
NINJA TUNE

Following the success of 2021's 'OnlyL' EP, which earned London's TSHA a place on recent festival line-ups alongside the likes of Bicep and Floating Points, 'Capricorn Sun' is a collection of poignant club tracks. Impassioned and soulful, the record offers seamless amalgamations of this rapidly ascending producer's varied influences, with the likes of 'Water' (featuring Oumou Sangaré) and 'Dancing In The Shadows' (with Clementine Douglas) combining Orbital-esque beats and soaring 90s acid house vocals to create singularly intense and emotive dancefloor fillers. **CC**

CONFLUX COLDWELL
The Phantomatic Coast
SUBEXOTIC

Mick "Conflux" Coldwell's work frequently revolves around the idea of loss. The Leeds musician's 'AM (Ante Meridiem)' album explored the decline of medium wave radio, while 'Virtual Private Broadcast' evoked digital streams of forgotten cameras. Now he has created a soundtrack to his own film about coastal erosion, channeling the ghosts of declining shores. 'Views From Sunk Island' captures a fading coastline with the click of a slide projector, while elsewhere field recordings of waves, foghorns and the shriek of seabirds make this hauntological seaside excursion captivatingly moody. **ST**

SPÖÖN FAZER
Set Fazer To Stun
OM SWAGGER

Spöön Fazer's coldwave back catalogue lay undiscovered for some 40 years before Om Swagger released the compilation 'Alternative Regression Therapy', a snapshot of Fazer's 1980s output that felt like a cohesive album in its own right. Here, it's a more colourful, scattershot affair, with a rollicking tribute to Marc Bolan ('T R E X') and the dizzying proto-Dead Or Alive cover of 'Johnny Remember Me' rubbing shoulders with the stately 'Kabuki' and the marimba-driven 'Independence', and now, the time capsule is a kaleidoscopic, DayGlo one. **AT**

HERVA
Seez
PLANET MU

'Seez' has been in the works for some time – Herva conceived the idea just after the release of his scintillating 2017 album, 'Hyper Flux'. But having since thrown himself into making his own music hardware, this album is a drastic departure from the Italian producer's former sample-heavy fare, with the music coded, often self-generating and rarely adhering to any recognised scales. Beauty emerges from the randomness, either in brutal form – as on the thumping, throbbing 'Imperat' – or the genuinely melancholic 'Anm'. Challenging listening, for sure, but hugely rewarding, too. **BW**

SIMON JAMES

SIMON JAMES
Electronic Breeze
LO RECORDINGS

Sussex sound artist Simon James is one of a handful of electronic musicians to master the often unfathomable Buchla system, producing deeply tactile works that frequently evolve in unexpected directions. 'Electronic Breeze' includes two long pieces – 'A Sound Has An Inside' and 'The Eyes Connect' – that were originally created for an installation in Salford. Both feature kalimba and wind chimes alongside James' faithful Buchla, creating a sense of calm and soothing hopefulness. Wonderfully unpredictable and beautifully enveloping by turns. **MS**

MJ HIBBETT
The Unearthly Beauty Of MJ Hibbett
ARTISTS AGAINST SUCCESS

As an accomplished troubadour of the trivial, Hibbett is a criminally unsung spiritual cousin of Half Man Half Biscuit. With his trademark C86 jangles now augmented by squelchy synths, he gently rails against wondrously mundane annoyances. It's the lo-fi synthpop of 'Kenny's Brother Alan's Stag Do' that steals the glory here. "He's the kind of total wanker who acts like he owns the pub / And he never gets a round in, his name is Nigel Grubb". Think Adrian Mole with a Casiotone. **BF**

AMON TOBIN
A Living Room
NOMARK

The Amon Tobin sonic spaceship continues its journey into the unknown with this 20-minute sound soak. Commissioned for art builders Meow Wolf's Omega Mart installation in Las Vegas, 'A Living Room' is an imaginary visit to its outrageous, consumerist pop art fuckery, as Tobin magicks up a slow-moving anaesthetic reverie of swaying, blurred atmospheres and 'Oxygène'-esque squalls. Profound bass interventions open chasms of existential anxiety, only to be soothed by the beauty of what's on offer. As a metaphor for modern shopping, it's bang on Target. **MR**

STRÖME
Nr. 2
COMPOST

The cult Moog IIIP modular synthesiser drives this debut long-player by Munich duo Mario Schönhofer and Tobias Weber ('Nr. 1' was an EP, released in 2016). Over 14 tracks, Ströme adeptly steer their machines through synthpop, krautrock and ambient, plus pure dancefloor moments like the part Daft Punk, part 80s sci-fi groove of 'Trang & Flinky' and the dark, almost-disco inflections of 'Panta Rhei'. Franz Ferdinand's Nick McCarthy also guests on 'Right Now', 'Das Modul' and the epic, spiralling 'Stadlberg'. As first albums go, this is pretty extraordinary. **CF**

OBERST & BUCHNER

Marble Arch

HEIMLICH MUSIK

Andreas Buchner and Sebastian Oberst are two electronic musicians who reside between Vienna and Berlin. 'Marble Arch' is something of a curate's egg in that the instrumentals here, such as the opener 'Arpology' and the title track, are atmospheric, downtempo soundscapes that are a delight to get lost in. Elsewhere, the cast of guest singers – including Aydo Abay and Mimu – bring a brand of pop to the table that, depending on your tastes, might be a touch too sweet. **JA**

AIRCOOLED

St Leopards

MUSIC'S NOT DEAD

Blow the cobwebs off your hot pants… here come Sussex polymath Oliver Cherer and one-time Elastica drummer Justin Welch with a collection of splendidly mesmeric, disco-fuelled workouts. The 16-minute, self-referentially titled 'Aircooled' sets the mood, with Cherer's psychedelic guitar grumbling in the gaps between Welch and bassist Katharine Wallinger's vice-tight grooves. The influence of Neu! hangs heavy over 'Offenhauser 360', while the concluding 'Supamotodisco' is so steeped in the legacy of spacey, lycra-clad funk that the only thing missing is an accompanying Hot Gossip dance routine. **BF**

RUPERT LALLY

Wanderweg

MODERN AVIATION

Something of a departure from his familiar electronic soundscapes, Switzerland-based Rupert Lally offers up a more bucolic, naturalistic framework on his latest album, 'Wanderweg'. Inspired by walks with his dog around the countryside near his home, pieces like 'Across The Rushing Waters' and 'We Head For Home' are laden with strings, guitars and a melodic grandeur that reflect the graceful Swiss landscapes he's exploring. A welcome breath of healing fresh air. **MS**

SIAVASH AMINI & EUGENE THACKER

Songs For Sad Poets

HALLOW GROUND

Like an inky pall slowly creeping across the land, Iranian musician Siavash Amini and American writer Eugene Thacker have created a suite of caustic and doomy soundscapes here. For a project inspired by "poètes maudits" – "cursed poets" such as Gérard De Nerval and Jean-Joseph Rabearivelo – these uneasy textures make complete sense. While tracks like 'Obsidian Sorrows' and 'Smoldering Stars' don't feature spoken lyrics, they evoke the claustrophobia and melancholy of Thacker's text, which is included in the accompanying poetry booklet. Intriguing, and immersive. **ST**

KAREL

Denouncing The Hypocrisy Of Our Time

BANDCAMP

This cerebral take on synthwave is brought to us by an Amsterdam artist whose singular approach promises much. Right from acerbic opener 'Sentimental Art' you feel you're hearing something familiar yet new. This is perhaps explained by the nostalgic sound of the vintage Yamaha and Prophet synths that make clubby tracks like 'Always In My Head' sound like an after-dark Depeche Mode. On the woozy, phased 'About Men' though, there's a rare and engaging emotional depth that's genuinely head-turning. **CG**

PERSONAS

Zen Koans For Subway Commuters

PERSONAS

Personas is a collaboration between London's Pleasure Cruiser (Nic Liu) and Tokyo's Smoke Thief (Georgie Art Baker), with a little help from Japanese producer Soichi Terada, aka Omodaka. The title very much encapsulates the concept here – a collection of meditative ambient tracks with lots of floating drones, limpid piano, mellow sax and field recordings from the Tokyo Metro. Moments like 'Elevation' show that tranquillity is achievable anywhere if you try hard enough, while 'People At Junctions' is slightly steelier, but the overall mood is one of drifting in blissful isolation. **JB**

ULTRAFLEX

Infinite Wellness

STREET PULSE

Nordic synthpop with a twist of riot grrrl attitude, as Icelandic/Norwegian duo Ultraflex – Farao and Special-K – discuss the concerns of besties, Bacardi and boring, boring boys to a soundtrack of pulsing basslines, drum machines and dazzling melodies. It would all leave a saccharine taste in the mouth if it wasn't for the bewitching songwriting on tracks such as 'Under The Spell', a Kraftwerk-meets-Saint Etienne electropopper, and ghostly smooch-fest 'Ultrasex'. The fact that emotions and performances alike are raw and heartfelt only serves to enhance their appeal. **BW**

SUSSEX TELECOM

Creator Warehouse

THIRD KIND

Sussex Telecom is a deeply undercover Third Kind Records collective dealing in what they describe as "future retroism". Made up of seven anonymous producers, they're inspired by the golden eras of Warp and Rephlex, and the 10 tracks on 'Creator Warehouse' duly offer authentic memories of crisp mid-90s electronica. 'Ort973' messes with crunchy, irregular beats, 'Jengu' opts for a spare, icy electro framework and 'End Credits' feels like a strategic inversion of house music. An absolute must for sinewave surfers and those who enjoy soaks in analogue bubblebaths. **MS**

REAPER ON RED - PHOTO: NIKITA GROSS

REAPER ON RED

The Zodiac Lights

REQUISITE RECORDINGS

From Cincinnati with fuzz. The debut album by Reaper On Red, a hot new project for Ohio alt scene stalwarts Robert and Carla Cherry, 'The Zodiac Lights' is an intense swirl of droney, hooky, hazy, sultry psych. Imagine if John Carpenter and Moe Tucker had joined The Sisters Of Mercy and you're nearly there. The shimmering 'Way Beyond The Waves', the bass-heavy 'Minds Alight', and the dark pop stomp that is 'Mourning Nights' are among the many highlights, while their imperious version of Love And Rockets' 'No Big Deal' is a strong indication of where ROR are coming from. It all adds up to an intoxicating brew from start to finish. Drink long and drink deep. **P**

THE SOFT MOON

Exister

SACRED BONES

The Soft Moon is the alias of Californian musician Luis Vasquez and his work is a melange of brooding synths and urgent melodic drive. 'Exister' takes those same hooks and energy, cladding them with Vasquez's most industrial-sounding textures to date. 'Him' and 'Unforgiven' – the latter featuring Alli Logout from New Orleans punksters Special Interest – are the album's prickly high points, churning and boiling like hot coals dropped on ice, while 'Answers' could easily find a deserved place on Gary Numan's recent album, 'Intruder'. **ST**

SAINT ABDULLAH & EOMAC

Patience Of A Traitor

OTHER PEOPLE

Iranian-Canadian brothers Mohammad and Mehdi Mehrabani-Yeganeh, aka Saint Abdullah, collaborate with Irish beatmaker Eomac on this vibrant album that challenges perceptions of religious faith, namely Islam and Christianity. Field recordings and cut-and-paste vocals coalesce with powerful, slow-moving electronics, as on the commanding 'At The Opposite Pole Of Architectural Virtue', which sees hip hop and jazz licks collide in a galaxy of samples and distorted bass boom. Intimate and visceral, 'Patience Of A Traitor' is a potent soundtrack to realities both palpable and imagined. **CF**

WADADA LEO SMITH, ANDREW CYRILLE & QASIM NAQVI

Two Centuries

RED HOOK

This collaboration between two octogenarian giants of avant-jazz with musical technology guru Qasim Naqvi feels like an exquisite port in a storm. The synergy of nocturnal jazz and experimental electronica on 'Two Centuries' seems effortless, which describes the music well, too. Distinguished and poised, it elicits a sense of peacefulness, especially on the ambient concluding track 'Orion Arm'. 'Palaver' is the most spiky electronic-based number, but elsewhere it's all smooth waters and meditative creation. **JA**

ERYK SALVAGGIO

ERYK SALVAGGIO
Worlding: Sympoietic Mycology
NOTYPE

Nurturing spores of fungi to fruition in the circuit boards of synthesisers, Canadian electronicist and artist Eryk Salvaggio grew rather than composed 'Worlding…', an album inspired by the work of feminist scholar Donna Haraway. Every note is played solely by the impulses of fungal communication, yet for all its conceptual preoccupations the music itself remains authentically engaging. From the beguiling off-planet mists of 'Proximity To A Human Hand' to the jubilant arpeggiated rhythm variations of 'Phototropic Response', it appears mushrooms make for brilliant music. Who knew? **FH**

OTHER LANDS
Archipelagos
ATHENS OF THE NORTH

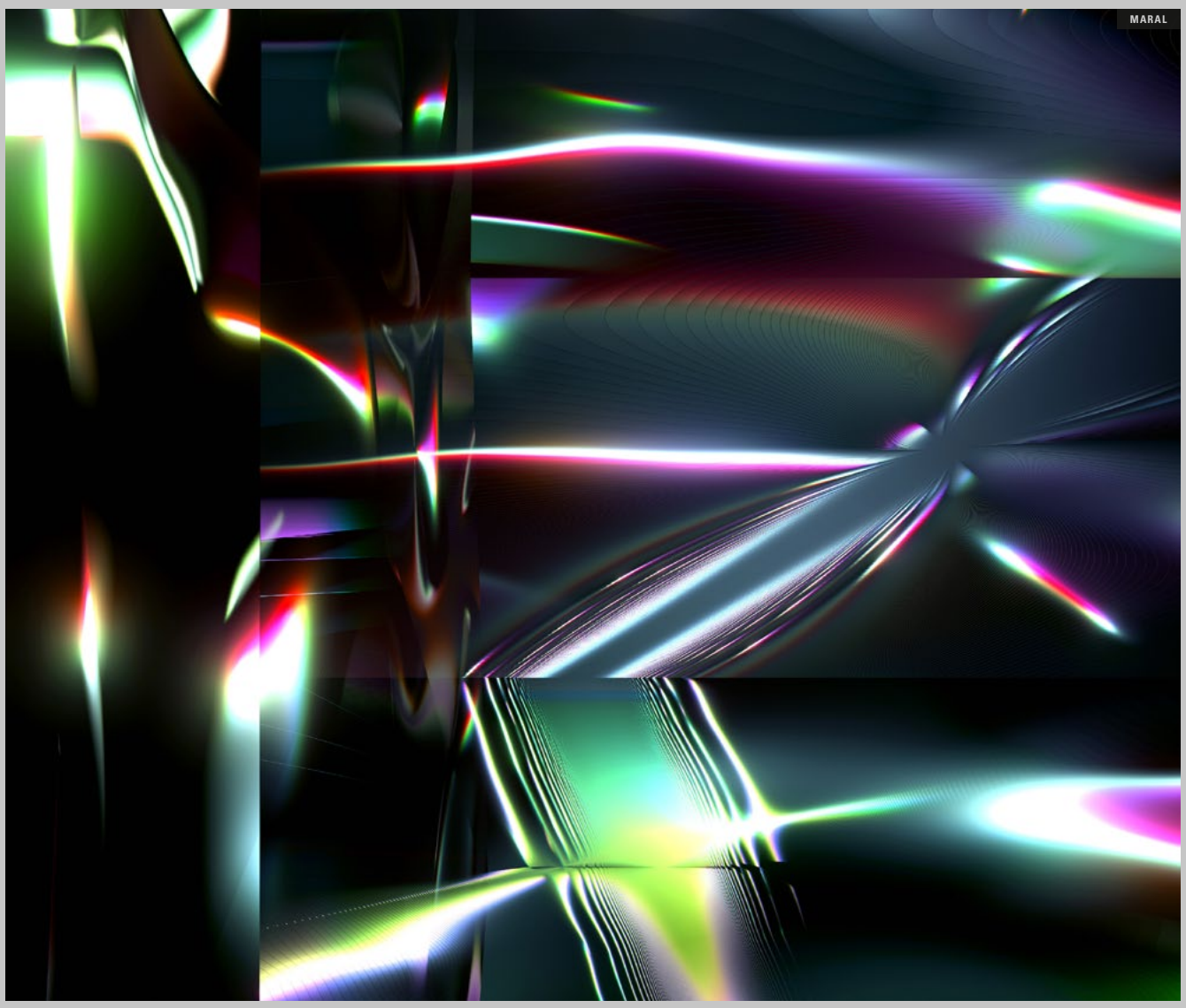
This dreamy ambient release from Scottish composer Other Lands (Gavin L Sutherland) evokes coastal landscapes and endless skies. A record inspired by a series of multi-instrumental improvisations spurred by notions of islands and isolation, the tracks shift in mood and tone like clouds drifting across the sun. 'Open Sea' glitters with meditative keys and strings, while the haunting 'Cave Code', with its watery samples and lush production, alludes to the comfort found in solitude and the complexities of island life. **CC**

I WORK IN COMMUNICATIONS
Kiss My Emoji Ring
TIER.DEBUT

Recorded in Athens and London, 'Kiss My Emoji Ring' is the second long-player of manipulated, reconstructed post-rock and jazztronica from I Work In Communications, a project led by Marius Mathiszik and featuring Dave De Rose and, on this album, renowned saxophonist/clarinettist George Crowley. The swinging beats and flanged bass of 'Mission To Find A Christmas Tree On Mars' come dusted in glittering digital scree, while the ghostly improv of 'Blubberplanet II' falls down all sorts of electronic rabbit holes, like a sparer Szun Waves. Disorientating, but strangely pleasurable. **JB**

MONOCHROME ECHO
Moonkeeper Reckoning
SPUN OUT OF CONTROL

The splendid 'Moonkeeper' sci-fi trilogy, helmed by Divine Comedy bassist Simon Little, concludes here with alien beasties from Jupiter following hapless human colonists back to Tokyo. But the gentle arpeggios of 'Fire From The Sky' suggest a surprisingly chilled invasion, and the blissed-out 'A Call To Arms' even implies the resistance movement was founded in the Café Del Mar. Meanwhile, the epic John Carpenter-style synths of 'The Redeemer' evoke images of a vest-clad Bruce Willis clenching his fist atop a windswept Mount Fuji. And both Willis and Little – of course – emerge victorious. **BF**



MARAL
Ground Groove
LEAVING

Maral's sound sources – old cassettes of Iranian classical, folk and pop music – are one reason why the tracks on this third long-player sound so unique, but her main sleight of hand is in how she skilfully melds the material together. 'Come Around' takes what sounds like an echoing prayer call and hitches it to a rhythm so crunchy it could break teeth. That industrial-dub sensibility runs through the entire album, giving these heavyweight pieces a visceral impact and resonance. Powerful transmissions from the rising American-Iranian producer. **MS**

ADRIAN CORKER
Since It Turned Out Something Else
SN VARIATIONS

From its opening moments, 'Since It Turned Out Something Else' vibrates with a kind of strange potency, like the sound of some cursed orchestra warming up. Constructed from multiple recordings made in various locations from Japan to France, Sheffield musician and composer Adrian Corker conjures an affecting intimacy and urgency. 'Three Sides Of The Same' places us in the centre of a waxing, instrumental drone, while the swelling strings of 'Various Metrics I' loom out of fog like the lights of an oncoming train. Intensely and startlingly brilliant. **ST**

THE HOLOGRAM PEOPLE
Village Of The Snake God
LIBRARY OF THE OCCULT

"The Hologram People advise no one to attempt this journey without the correct and proper physical and mental preparation". Or, indeed, an appreciation of those 1970s Amicus films in which Caroline Munro is lured to swinging Kensington soirees where the mirrors suddenly start dripping blood. It's Dom Keen and Jonathan Parkes with a cellar full of lurid grooves, funky enough to rattle the fillings in Peter Cushing's teeth. 'Chant Ecstatic' is a gloriously unholy dance around a Satanic hammered dulcimer, and 'Drone Of The Holy Numbers' a psychedelic wig-out in Denim aftershave. Brilliant fun. **BF**

ERIK MOWINCKEL
Flere Steder Samtidig
DUGNAD

Translated as 'Many Places At Once', Norwegian producer Erik Mowinckel's debut for Oslo label Dugnad genuinely feels like a multidimensional passport. The photographer and self-taught electronic musician's gentle combinations of field recordings and ambient synths smoothly transport the listener to a space of solitude and peace. 'Løv' shimmers like a brilliant light above quiet waters, tinged with grey melancholy, while on 'Luft Og Vann' those same waters splash and burble to pleasing, calming effect. Lovely stuff. **FH**

ANTONIS ANTONIOU

ANTONIS ANTONIOU
Throisma
AJABU!

On Antonis Antoniou's second solo album, the Monsieur Doumani band member builds on the politically motivated grooves of his acclaimed 2021 debut 'Kkismettin'. Here though, the sound is harder and more focused, and the motifs of Anatolian and Cypriot folk instruments are executed in a more cyclical, catchy way, mixed up with electronics and musique concrète. 'Potte' swaggers like The Stranglers' 'Peaches', and the title track carries a strong eastern Mediterranean vibe, with a riff that will make itself welcome and stay with you for weeks. **JA**

THE HEARTWOOD INSTITUTE
Hedges
WOODFORD HALSE

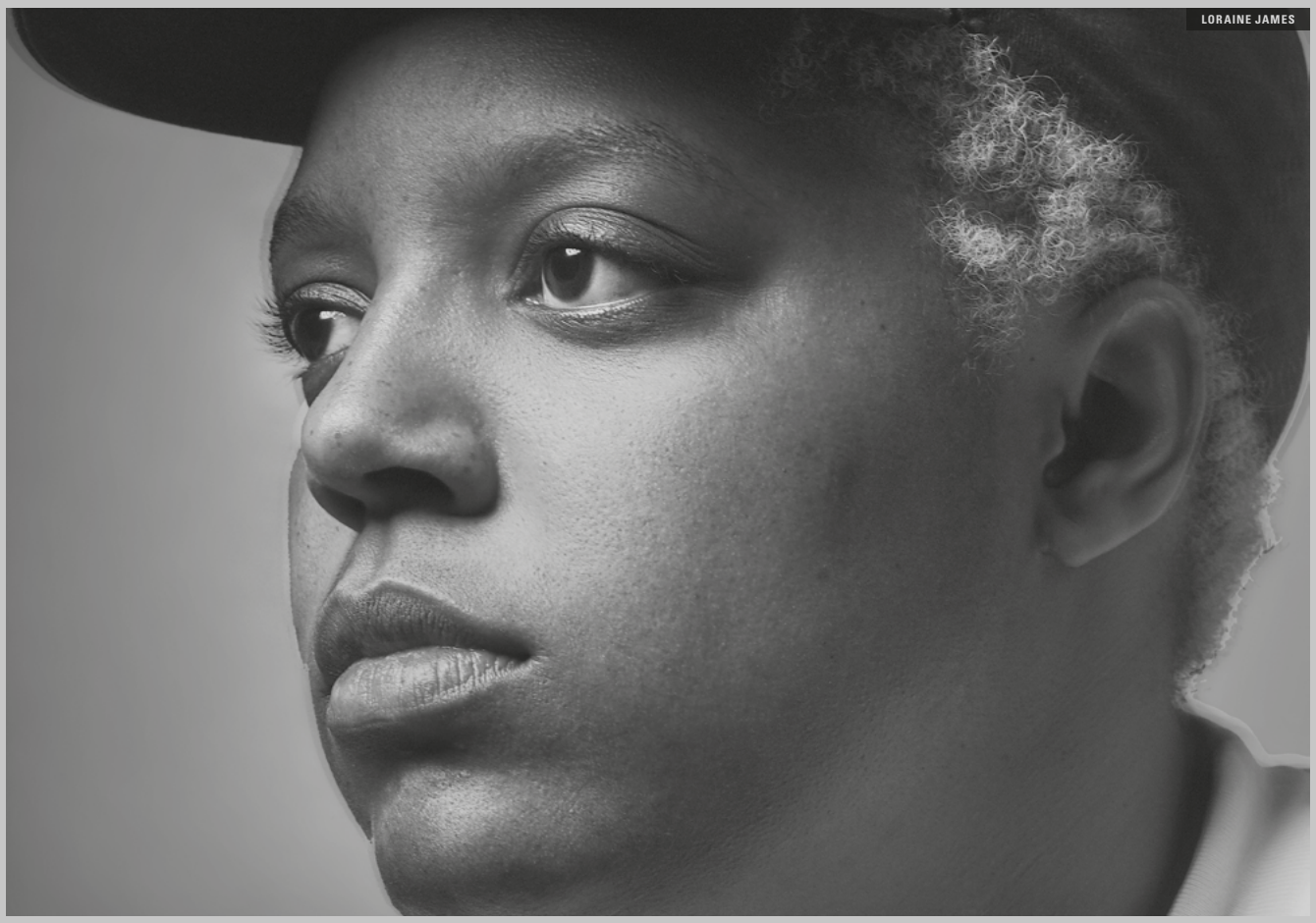
Who's that hiding in the privet? Why, it's Cumbria's own Jonathan Sharp, with an album taking inspiration from his childhood Ladybird book of the same title. The opener, 'Dogwood', is a gentle country ramble, the hypnotic tinkle of melodic synths flitting like busy butterflies. But it's not all Cornettos and sunhats. 'Honeysuckle' fizzles into faded tape stock and 'Black Bryony' is the sinister drone of a sun-drunk wasp. A lazy summer holiday of an album, but with nasty little beasties buzzing in the bushes. **BF**

MELAWATI
Aritmia
ELLUM AUDIO

Belgian musician Melawati (Martijn Ravesloot) transmutes improvisations and happy accidents on modular synth and "modified machines" into serene downtempo techno. Though almost anthemic in places (as on the chord-led 'Riddles'), 'Aritmia' is a debut album of relative introspection within its melodic refrains. 'Somebody' and 'You And I' – both featuring guest vocalist Lisa Jane – are shimmeringly lush, while elsewhere Ravesloot showcases a spectrum of majestic analogue sounds, crafted in his Brussels studio during the pandemic. One to watch. **FH**

DUNGEN
En Är För Mycket Och Tusen Aldrig Nog
MEXICAN SUMMER

The cryptic title of this slice of electrifying Scandi psych ('One Is Too Much And A Thousand Is Never Enough') follows Dungen's widely lauded 'Allas Sak' from 2015. It's a welcome return for the Swedish group, whose thrilling combo of blasted fuzz, organic piano, brass and string-led warmth pulses with dancefloor electronics. 'Nattens Sista Strimma Ljus' in particular is a swirling beauty, and like the rest of the tracks here, it has a star-bound quality that proves irresistible. **CG**


LORAINE JAMES

LORAINE JAMES
Building Something Beautiful For Me
PHANTOM LIMB

Loraine James of Whatever The Weather fame teams up with Phantom Limb to pay tribute to, and take serious inspiration from, undervalued New York composer, Julius Eastman. He died penniless, homeless and substance-addicted in 1990, so under-appreciated that not even all his musical output survived. But James and Eastman's surviving brother Gerry have resolved to spread the word (and sound) of his unique work.

This album came about after Gerry offered James a zip drive full of Eastman originals, and here his presence looms large, either through specific samples and motifs or a more general adoption of themes and imagery.

The power of the finished article is a blend of simplicity and complexity – for instance, in the way that programmed machines and the manipulated, wonky sound of a live drummer interact on 'Enfield, Always', or the slide from wistful simplicity to fizzling, malfunctioning decay on 'Maybe If I (Stay On It)'. Best of all, though, is the stark 'Choose To Be Gay (Femenine)', so direct that it almost reaches out of the speakers to grab you. **BW**

KLAUS WEISS
Open Space Motion (Underscores)
BE WITH

Library gold alert! Billed as "panoramic proto-techno underwater-electro dynamite" by excellent reissue label Be With, and originally released in 1981 on Munich's seminal Coloursound imprint, this album is considered to be one of the greatest-ever library recordings.

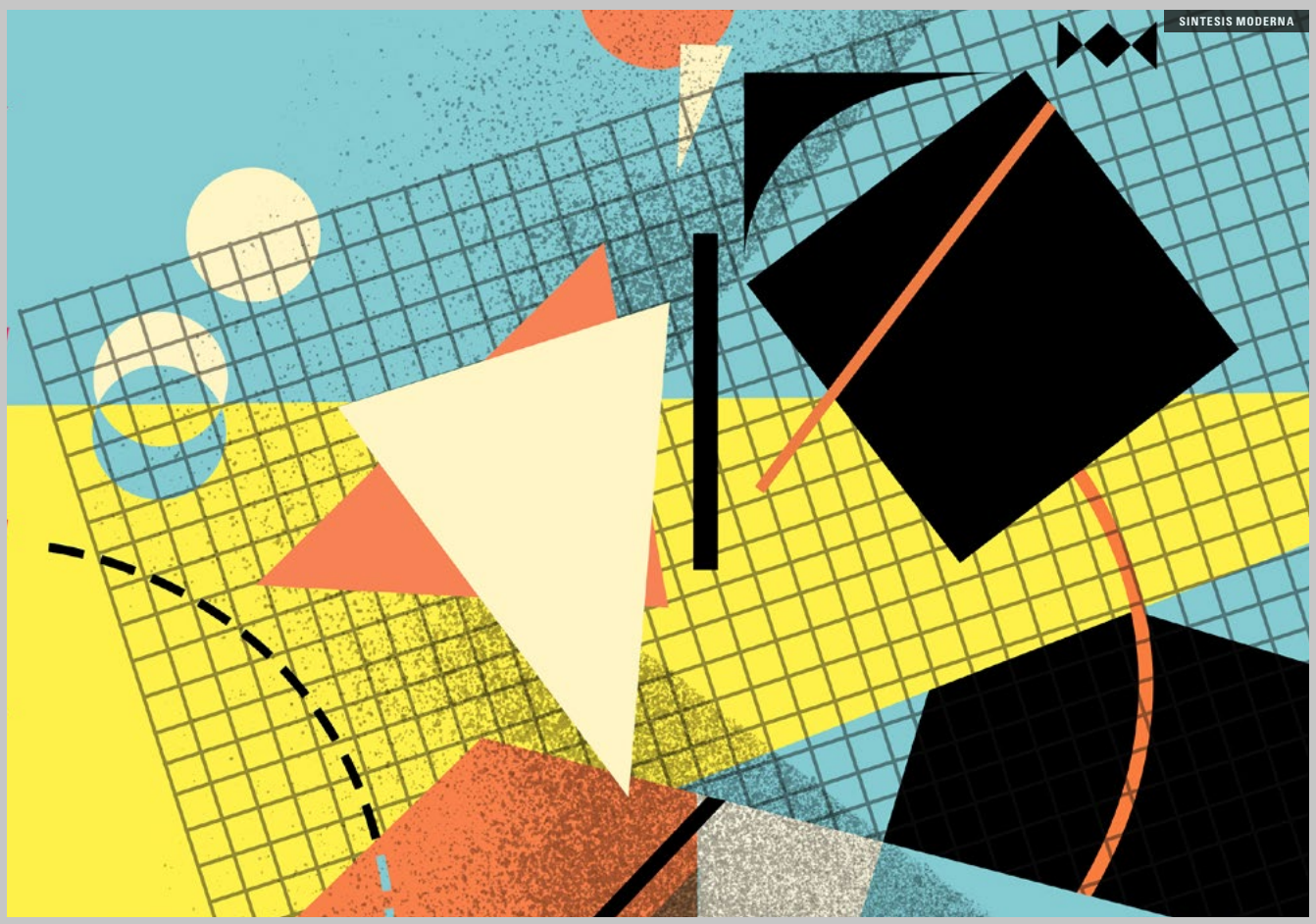
It's certainly a classic, and unusually for German cult figure Weiss, it's entirely beatless, but the influence of his sound can't be overstated. On tracks like the opalescent, sunset-rich 'Pink Sails' for example, you'll recognise the inspirational roots of contemporary analogue electronicists such as The Advisory Circle. Elsewhere, you'll hear echoes of Berlin School pastoral kosmische on the flute-led and deliciously utilitarian 'Relaxed Mood'.

Among the most thrilling listens here are propulsive numbers like 'Driving Sequences' and 'Changing Directions', all sweeping sci-fi synths and slick, funk-led percussion, hinting at early Detroit techno. For collectors or otherwise, this is unmissable stuff. **CG**

SIMPLE MINDS
Direction Of The Heart
BMG

Pretty much everyone can now acknowledge that the run of Simple Minds' first five albums were just untouchable, merging synths and guitars to seductive, arty and cinematic effect. And the massive records that followed were – despite what the grumbling weekly press would have you believe – pretty damn good as well.

After a rough old 1990s, Jim Kerr and Charlie Burchill have been enjoying a creative rebirth for over a decade now. And the good news is, on their latest album, 'Direction Of The Heart', it's not over. In standouts 'Act Of Love' (updating the first song they ever played live in 1978) and 'Vision Thing' (inspired in part by the time Kerr spent in Glasgow with his terminally ill father), we have tracks to sit alongside their anthemic best, expressing the personal and intimate in a synth-driven, widescreen way that only Simple Minds can pull off. It might not be the record to win over a new generation, but there's something here for even the most casual Simple Minds listener. Big and clever in all the right ways. **AT**



VARIOUS ARTISTS

Sintesis Moderna: An Alternative Vision Of Argentinian Music 1980-1990

SOUNDWAY

The words of The Originals' 'Vamos A La Playa' encapsulate the feeling which runs through this scintillating 19-track compilation – "Let's go to the beach! / The radioactivity is here!". An Argentinian cover of an Italo-disco classic, its sharp, sardonic lyrics puncture the track's effervescent synths.

Documenting a time when Argentina was dealing with turmoil on several fronts – the Falklands War and the aftermath of a military dictatorship – these songs distil that sense of uneasy flux via an electronic sound which, at the time, was progressive and relatively alternative. That said, there is considerable stylistic range.

Mike Ribas' 'Secuencia Sin Consecuencias' sets louche, American cop show bombast against a kind of Cold War dread, while Abaddon's 'No Es Computable' sounds like Devo covering 'Physical'. The pieces here read like mutated versions of what was happening in Europe – Kraftwerk and ZTT records chewed up and spat out with an irresistible Argentinian twist. **ST**

RON GEESIN

Sunday Bloody Sunday (OST)

TRUNK

For over five decades, Ron Geesin has been a puckishly eclectic prankster on the fringes of British electronica, and this welcome collection brings together three of his long-buried TV and film scores.

'Sunday Bloody Sunday' itself was John Schlesinger's 1971 follow-up to 'Midnight Cowboy', acclaimed for Murray Head's groundbreaking depiction of a bisexual sculptor, and Geesin's soundtrack is appropriately sensitive. 'Sky High Balloons' is a graceful dance of classical guitars, 'Chemical Dreams' an autumnal jazz daydream with wordless vocalising by Bridget St John. 'Blitzful Memories', meanwhile, is a sinister rumble hinting at Geesin's more experimental tendencies.

On the flip-side are a joyously rhythmic synth soundtrack to a 1985 documentary, 'Viv', about cricketer Viv Richards, and a collection of genuinely disturbing cues from 'Shapes In The Wilderness', a 1970 BBC examination of art therapy in mental hospitals. All credit to Trunk for collating these important lost pieces of Geesin's wildly varying musical jigsaw. **BF**

DEATHPROD

Sow Your Gold In The White Foliated Earth

SMALLTOWN SUPERSOUND

Deathprod – aka Norwegian composer and Supersilent member Helge Sten – specialises in grainy, occult ambience via the manipulation of decaying electronic media. But the sound sources on his latest release are entirely acoustic, albeit still a world away from traditional instrumentation.

Originally commissioned by Oslo's Ultima Festival for contemporary music in 2014, the album consists of nine pieces – numbered 'I O' to 'IX O' – played by Sten on a unique collection of custom-made instruments designed by avant-garde composer Harry Partch. Tuned to just intonation rather than standard Western intervals, they create a chiming, flowing clangour that sounds like an orchestra of giant hammered dulcimers.

The effect is variously intense, mystical and ritualistic – but while it's experimental with a capital "E" and uncompromising in its opacity, it's never alienating. It's also oddly mechanistic in places – 'IV O' could be the flexing of a vast machine's innards, while sparks rise from the instruments as they're struck on 'VI O'. An alchemical one-off. **JB**

JOHANNA WARREN

JOHANNA WARREN
Lessons For Mutants
WAX NINE

Midway through recording 'Lessons For Mutants', Johanna Warren swapped the sun-drenched buzz of her native LA for a new life in the Welsh countryside. And while it's commendable that her sixth long-player isn't a concept album about intermittent drizzle, it's still a collection with a winsomely rustic sound. "If everyone was a colour, you'd be red and I'd be orange / So I could sit next to you in the rainbow," she sings on 'I'd Be Orange'. But this is no cutesy nu-folk album.

'Piscean Lover' is brassy grunge, and the searing 'Oaths' is 'Aerial'-era Kate Bush, complete with jagged violin from Bush's own nephew, Raven. It comes with lavishly Byronic verse, and Warren's knack for combining the poetic with the confessional pervades throughout. "To me you were a crutch / That I used to help myself feel semi-stable in the moment," she sings on 'Hi Res', assuming the perspective – brace yourselves – of a man who once deluged her with artfully shot dick pics. An album of steely beauty. **BF**

DEEPCHORD
Functional Designs
SOMA

Glasgow's Soma Records do a neat line in functional bangers. Pneumatic bass drums that crumble warehouse walls, that kind of thing. Dub techno don Rod Modell's return to the label under his DeepChord alias reminds us that Soma have deeper roots. 'Pneumatic' comes from the Greek word "breathe", and boy does this album know it.

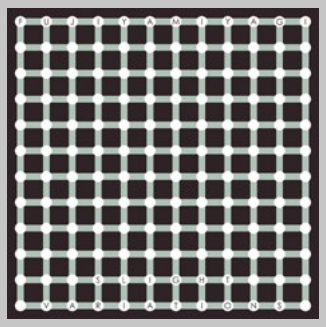
The tectonic transcendence of 2017's 'Auratones' is taken deeper, wider, everywhere-er. Ambience swarms until it coagulates, turning bass thuds into distant fuzz. Among miniscule droplets of surprisingly listenable sound design, muffled drums top 140 bpm without breaking a stride. The snappiest moment is 'Strangers', but even that techno stomp is lost down an impressive chasm of gasping mechanics.

During the deeply dubby metronomic menace of 'Pressure', time seems to suspend. You'll be checking your clock to see if the Earth is still moving. And breathe. Can you feel that warehouse wall succumbing to the noise? It's not crumbling, it's floating. **FR**

TVAM
High Art Lite
INVADA

TVAM's Joe Oxley has upped the pop ante on his second solo record, with plenty of overdriven distortion clipping satisfyingly at the edges. While 2018's 'Psychic Data' was Numan-esque and almost prog-like, signalling a great talent had hitherto been hiding in a Wigan bedroom perfecting something quite special, 'High Art Lite' is the fulfilment of that promise. A 40-minute blast that flits from big beat to baggy, electro to shoegaze, it's fuelled by Oxley's signature driving sound coming up the rear.

'Shallow Ends' carries over some of the new wave-inspired cybergoth theatrics of Oxley's debut, though there's more variety at play here. 'Future Flesh' brings vigorous, Chemical Brothers-style breakbeats, and 'Every Day In Every Way' and 'Say Anything' pack filthy, infectious riffs. Beneath all that echo, 'High Art Lite' also has plenty to say about the societal divide and the way that JG Ballard saw the future unfolding. Astute and addictive. **JA**



FUJIYA & MIYAGI
Slight Variations
IMPOSSIBLE OBJECTS OF DESIRE

Essential listening from Brighton stalwarts

If you wanted a way to sum up the distinct Weltanschauung of Brighton's Fujiya & Miyagi, a lyric from 'Sweat' on their new album is a good place to start.

"If you play with matches the chances of getting burnt / Are statistically higher than if you don't," sings frontman David Best over a sparse electro rhythm. It's a lyric that is beautifully quotidian, almost as if Best was reading a warning on a box of firelighters as he was writing. But it's also metaphorical, ushering in a line that juxtaposes nihilistic behaviour with a compulsive, sensual need for dancing. By the track's conclusion, the rhythm has become funky and dramatic, and his vocal has edged toward the Damo Suzuki-esque whisper that has been a signifier of some of Fujiya & Miyagi's most essential moments since Best and Stephen Lewis arrived in 2000.

Now a quartet with drummer Ed Chivers and bassist Ben Adamo, Fujiya & Miyagi have evolved their sound in a number of directions, but the nucleus of their left-field pop has never altered – a mix of what Best calls "awkward funk", the energy of Italo-disco, an affection for vintage 1980s synth music and the motorik propulsion of 1970s German rock. These elements can all be found in abundance on 'Slight Variations'. But, like 2019's 'Flashback', there's a certain dynamism, immediacy and resoluteness to the production here. The title track is just about the most energetic, insistent and danceable thing they've ever produced, while the crunchy beats that open 'Non-Essential Worker' quickly give way to a krautrock groove, its central melodic refrain triggering hazy memories of Violinski's 'Clog Dance' – for this listener, at least.

There are many highlights here, but if one song edges above the rest it's the languid, cynical grooves of closing track 'Feeling The Effects (Of Saturday Night)'. Here, the group seem to synthesise The Gap Band's 'Oops Upside Your Head', the brutality of hangovers as you get older, the over-consumption of needless carbohydrates and the nagging feeling that it's increasingly difficult to be impressed or surprised by anything. Thankfully, that's not a charge that could ever be levelled at Fujiya & Miyagi.

MAT SMITH

Brief Encounters

Fujiya & Miyagi frontman **David Best** faces our barrage of quick-fire questions

Hello, David. Where are you right now and what can you see?
"I'm at home in Hove and I can see a rabbit."

You say that if someone new to Fujiya & Miyagi played 'Slight Variations', it would "convey everything you're about". Er… what are you about?
"The short answer would be something flippant and snappy like introverted motorik funk. The slightly longer answer would be that our greatest strength comes from never being that successful. What that leaves us with is making music for the sake of it. There is something in us which isn't driven by any other factor than the love of music."

The album title is a cheeky nod to people who think all your records sound the same, right?
"I suppose if you look at a forest from afar, all the trees look the same. It's not until you get up-close that you see the differences. You could say the same about anything. Roads all look the same. Cutlery is always pretty similar."

There's always a healthy hat-doff to Neu! in your work…
"Initially, we were a hybrid of our influences and perhaps still are. After 'Transparent Things', we made a conscious decision not to be so obviously influenced by the German groups we loved, as those musicians were still actively creating music. I feel more comfortable now with showing those influences as it's not a carbon copy."

And you've strayed into dub reggae-ish territory on 'FAQ'. That's an interesting change of tack…
"It's skating on thin ice, that's what it is. I've got so into dub and rocksteady over the last three years or so. I've got a theory that listening habits are linked to personal circumstances. During lockdown, we all lacked space so it made sense for me to find it in the caverns of dub. If you're waiting for a baby to be born, listening to Terry Riley can help pass the time. If you're busy, Devo can help speed things up. Quite a few people have said they like running to our music and we've also been told it's good for decorating."

Always liked your name. I'm sure I can Google this, but… why?
"It's our biggest regret. Every time I explain, a part of me dies, but here goes… Miyagi is from the film, 'The Karate Kid'. Fujiya is a brand of record player."

What was the plan when F&M started out? *Was* there a plan?
"We had a list of everything we didn't want to be. No guitar solos, no showing off, and no more than two chords per song. By taking away what we didn't want to be, we became what we wanted to be."

Any advice from current-day F&M to the early-doors version?
"Change your stupid name."

Buried Treasure

UNITS
Digital Stimulation
415, 1980

Generally speaking, listening to a self-aggrandising peer saying, "You like [influential band]? Well, you should really listen to [obscure band]" tends more towards an act of generosity and patience than an educational experience. With the genre that would come to be known as synthpunk, it's tempting to lord the flash-in-the-pan brilliance of San Francisco early adopters Units over conversations about the music of The Screamers or Suicide. In reality, it's much more fun to forget the pseudo-intellectual music history lesson and instead turn up 'High Pressure Days', the opening cut from Units' 1980 long-player, 'Digital Stimulation'.

With bouncing synth hooks alongside urgent vocal chants about the galloping pace of modern life, 'High Pressure Days' first saw light as a seven-inch single in 1979, but it sounds like it could have been released several years later. Can we still call a song infectious? If so, it's that. "I saw Johnny tonight!" yelp Scott Ryser and Rachel Webber in unison. "But we didn't say hello to each other / We're all moving pretty fast these days / Bumping around like bumper cars." It's a commanding, frenzied introduction to an album whose 11 tracks present synths as highly thrashable entities, distorting them to oblivion while yelling across the studio space over motorik drums.

My introduction to 'Digital Stimulation' came while sitting around a fire with friends Sarah Nicolls (one of the UK's eminent experimental pianists and former Warp signee) and her husband. There are some people whose background music choices demand you keep an ear out, and an inquisitive "Who's this, then?" has often escaped my lips in their company. "It reminds me of Talking Heads… but it's more punk!"

A little prosaic, but ostensibly accurate. They may have encroached into an underground punk scene 3,000 miles away from New York City, but the guitar-less Units were similarly endowed with the influence of performance art and experimental cinema. Proselytes were made. "I have always had this underlying feeling that synthesisers and other sterile-looking gadgets were generally intruders on the rock 'n' roll field and that nothing genuinely 'alive' could be extracted from their circuits, no matter how flash and brilliant some of their rock 'n' roll impersonations could be," wrote one journalist in a zine called Slash in 1979. "That night, watching Units pound their machines into submission, I knew that another cliched concept of mine was biting the dust once and for all."

A West Coast, new wave, pure-punk powerhouse – and with Futurismo recently reissuing the album, perhaps Units might finally get their due.

WILLIAM STOKES

LUCRECIA DALT
¡Ay!
RVNG INTL

Avant-garde/sci-fi storytelling

Lucrecia Dalt's work might be recondite – at least in terms of the mainstream – but she has achieved acclaim in recent years thanks to her dark, alluring and uncanny music. It's brave, exploratory and suffused with a raw honesty – otherworldly and sometimes abstract, yet still overflowing with humanity.

You might say that the Colombian experimental musician's latest long-player '¡Ay!' is her most accessible to date. Her recent projects have included an album about the meeting place between phenomenal and noumenal worlds (2020's 'No Era Sólida'), a volume of poetic theory and sound concerning the Earth's surface and the timescale of geology (2018's 'Anticlines'), and earlier this year, her debut film score about an alien blob crashing into a swimming pool ('The Seed'). Given the conceptual scope of these works, becoming more accessible shouldn't pose too much of an obstacle.

On '¡Ay!', there's a metaphysical narrative at play – the electronic manipulations and vibrant instrumentation offer "a soft but obscure landing for an alien entity called Preta". Accordingly, the songs explore moods of both light and dark. Tracks like 'Contenida' are loping, glowering, gloaming and sung entirely in Spanish. The elastic double bass, the enveloping brass and the gentle percussion create a kind of tropical rhythm, though there's an undercurrent of eeriness existing just below the surface.

There are certainly tunes here to latch onto, like the radiant slow bolero of 'La Desmesura'. And opener 'No Tiempo' creates the illusion of safety, though the Arkestra-like instrumentation towards the song's conclusion should indicate that we may go off-kilter here.

Dalt consciously taps into the musical wallpaper of her formative years and combines it with broodingly poetic language. On the percussive and intimate 'El Galatzó', where her Sprechgesang is accompanied by the odd burst of wild flute or the lurch of electronic instrumentation, she sings of snakes traversing the camino, unaware of time. It's gloriously oddball stuff, sensual and surreal. Accessible is a relative term, but Dalt has injected so much of herself into '¡Ay!', it feels like her most personal record to date.

JEREMY ALLEN

DAPHNI

DAPHNI
Cherry
JIAOLONG

Bish, bash, bosh. That's what people say when loosely lobbing ingredients into a recipe, isn't it? Mozzarella. Bash. Chilli powder. Bosh. This is Dan Snaith's third album under his clubbier pseudonym, a decade after his Daphni debut. And like someone concocting punch after drinking half the punch, these short, snappy tracks are designed to be tipped into DJ mixes with wild abandon. The album itself would blend brilliantly.

Bloopy bouncer 'Mania' matches nicely with urgent eurohouse number 'Mona', while the brief French disco of 'Falling' makes a neat appetiser for the wonky-faced piano acid of 'Fly Away'. The tastiest moment is the sparky yet soft 'Cloudy', as addictive as any of Snaith's work as Caribou.

The tracks are brief – no problem now that DJs have loop functions – so you'll be hitting replay with your rolling pin. Turn up the kitchen stereo, throw in some spice, the Caribou lad will be your DJ tonight. **FR**

JESSICA MOSS
Galaxy Heart
CONSTELLATION

With her fifth album, former Thee Silver Mt Zion violinist Jessica Moss has made a conscious effort to free herself of her own expectations. Recorded virtually with Dirty Three drummer Jim White and Godspeed You! Black Emperor's Thierry Amar, 'Galaxy Heart' mostly sidesteps the plaintive structures of Montreal-based Moss' earlier solo material, revealing more complex compositional passages and enriched timbres.

Opening track 'Resistance Creature' is noisy and defiant, with wild distortion adding an ominous, savage tone. The two 'Violin Study' pieces – 'Uncanny Being' and 'Uncanny Body' – are especially captivating and engaging. On the former, the adaptable White lays delicate percussive gestures around Moss' stentorian playing, while the latter track's squalling violins offset a fragile, unswerving drum machine pattern.

'Enduring Oceans' is the standout moment – a sparse, vocal-based work, it contrasts the frailty of human relationships with the unhurried pace of nature. All told, another bold and powerfully unsettling addition to the Moss catalogue. **MS**

IAN BODDY
Coil
DIN

Obviously, the glorification of analogue does not necessarily produce great music. DiN label boss Ian Boddy adores those warm tones, but he brings to them a singular creativity and joy that sets him apart from mere gear fetishists. On his latest album, 'Coil', the title track is a seven-minute Roland System-100M mini-drama, perfectly complemented by the euphoric bliss of 'Rings' that follows – both seem touched by the best of Jean-Michel Jarre's pre-Fairlight excursions.

The Moog-driven 'Teutonium', meanwhile, boasts a galloping bass punctuated by delicious icy stabs, creating a soundscape that wouldn't be out of place in Berlin in 1979. And, as if to prove he's master of all decades, 'Silver Surfer' is a playful synthwave outing that should accompany the flickering neon titles of the Duffer Brothers' next Netflix outing.

At once studied and playful, 'Coil' is further evidence of Boddy's immense production and compositional skill, appearing at once both complex and effortless. **AT**

BRIAN ENO - PHOTO: CECILY ENO

BRIAN ENO
FOREVERANDEVERNOMORE
UMC

The voice is back. No, not that telly programme with the spinny chairs. This is the first Eno album since 2005's 'Another Day On Earth' in which he has starred as solo singer. Here, he ruminates on humanity's uncertain future as strings lull and skies thunder. Not one for half measures, then.

His soft vocals resonate with lament. On the fizzing and unstable 'Garden Of Stars', he becomes an incanting choir, envisioning our planet of "rock and fire, gas and dust" ending after a billion years. Brief blazes of sinister static say it all. He's a storyteller, too, as his attention charmingly switches from the moon's endless motion to microscopic worms.

For extra oomph, also included is the elegiac 'There Were Bells', his Acropolis performance with Roger Eno. Other stars also shine brightly here, including Leo Abrahams, Jon Hopkins and Clodagh Simonds. But it's Eno's perfectly pitched voice that lingers, albeit in orbit around an ever-present abyss. **FR**

SAM PREKOP
The Sparrow
TAL

As a member of Chicago indie group The Sea And Cake, Sam Prekop made music jangling with subtle sophistication and emotion. His solo records channel a similar feel but rather than low-key jazziness, they're filtered instead through the circuits of dusty synths.

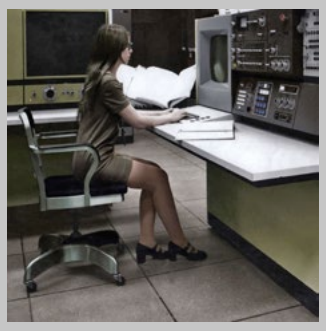
'The Sparrow', Prekop's latest release, finds the American musician at his most beguiling. The title track is a landscape of radiant synths that glisten and crunch like footsteps on frosty leaves. On 'Every Night' and 'Step And Stair', this autumnal feel continues – the former sets frigid synth cycles into reverberant patterns, while the latter extracts a cold melancholy from a circular analogue melody.

Where Prekop's work in The Sea And Cake conjured its wistful chill via lyrics, here tracks such as 'Fall Is Farewell' and 'Palm' evoke that coolness in bittersweet machine textures that vividly recall Belbury Poly's 'The Willows'. A seasonal delight. **ST**

SPRUNG AUS DEN WOLKEN
Sprung Aus Den Wolken
BUREAU B

Sprung Aus Den Wolken (Leap From The Clouds) is a curiously ethereal name for the raw realism of Kiddy Citny's self-titled debut. In the aftermath of punk, there was a tendency in Germany toward the reduction of music to its bare bones. The verite recordings on 1982's 'Sprung Aus Den Wolken' are built primarily from pulses, noise and bass guitar, and the resultant klang, peppered with Sprechgesang, has aged remarkably well.

This is industrial music, before it became a playground for adolescent indulgence. While sharing DNA with the contemporary work of DAF and Einstürzende Neubauten, it never feels like the work of also-rans. 'A-i Akcam La' employs a bouncy rhumba preset, slapped bass and synth swirls, while 'Que Pa' reveals an obvious kinship with Suicide. If you're seeking feral expression, red in tooth and claw, 'Sprung Aus Den Wolken' won't disappoint. **SB**



FUTURE CONDITIONAL

Isotech

SECOND LANGUAGE

Futurist collective return in fine style

The title is perfect. The picture on the cover is perfect too.

And to be honest, I could stop there. Because whatever the title and the picture make you think this record sounds like, well, that's exactly what this record sounds like.

'Isotech' is the second Future Conditional album from former Piano Magic mainstays Glen Johnson and Cédric Pin. It comes 15 years after their debut, 'We Don't Just Disappear', which they put out and then immediately, er, disappeared. That was some feat. OK, it wasn't a Lord Lucan and they were simply busy with other projects, but you get my point.

There are six vocalists on 'Isotech', Glen Johnson plus five guests, with newcomer Josh Cowey fronting 'Cold Love' and getting the album off to a killer start. Cowey's voice is redolent of Ian Curtis – it's disturbing at times – and there are touches of Joy Division in the icy synths, rolling bass and dry beats of the track as well. But while it's no great surprise when a cover of New Order's 'Doubts Even Here' pops up a bit later, don't start thinking 'Isotech' is a 1980s post-punk homage. It really isn't.

The glacial vibe of 'Cold Love' sets the tone for much of what follows. There's a detachment, a remoteness, an emptiness to most of the vocals. Mücha is virtually an android on the crisp electropop of 'Indexed To Impulse' and she nearly drifts away from the dreamy title cut. Johnson's contribution to the eerie 'Stephen' are more spoken than sung. And Bobby Wratten and Beth Arzy are remarkably lethargic on 'Demolitions'. Which, even more remarkably, is what makes this wonderfully doleful track so powerful.

Despite the chill factor, the production is totally seductive. Every element is placed with tremendous precision and that's particularly noticeable on 'Dumbstruck'. It's like two different songs, one funky and one trippy, drifting apart and sliding back together again. It sounds resolutely futuristic, dangerously so, but everything on 'Isotech' does. When it edges into post-punk, then, it's a 21st century version, the darkness illuminated, the grime swept away, the noise of heavy industry drowned out by the almost inaudible hum of technology, the sooty red bricks replaced by shiny glass. Not that Johnson and Pin fully approve, as the lyrics of 'Demolitions' attest: "They take the city and they break its heart / They take the people and they do the same".

Future Conditional have crafted a truly special record here. It's closer to flawless than anything I've heard in a long time. Here's hoping we don't have to wait until 2037 for the follow-up.

PUSH

Label Profile

Label: Second Language Music
Location: London
Est: 2009

Potted History: "When I was 14 or so, I was obsessed with the first Some Bizzare label compilation album," says Second Language founder Glen Johnson. "It included early tracks by The The, Depeche Mode, Blancmange, Soft Cell, B-Movie and lots of lesser-known – though no less fascinating – groups. I assumed it would be great fun to do something similar. The problem was, I was still at school and had no idea how to run a label.

"Cut to 2009, and I'd been the label manager of Rough Trade Records for almost 10 years. So, courtesy of Geoff Travis, I'd gotten an education. Along with friends, journalist/musician David Sheppard and Martin Jensen of The Home Current, we set up Second Language – named after a track by Disco Inferno – to release music by ourselves and our friends. These days, I run it alone but the modus operandi hasn't changed."

Mission Statement: "In 2009, there seemed to be a lot of people around us who were making great music but, because their music was 'left-field', there was no record label interest. We wanted to give those artists a platform, however small. The first release on Second Language, 'Tombola', under my Textile Ranch moniker, funded the second release and the second release funded the third. Before we knew it, we were putting out five or six records a year, mostly in hand-assembled packaging."

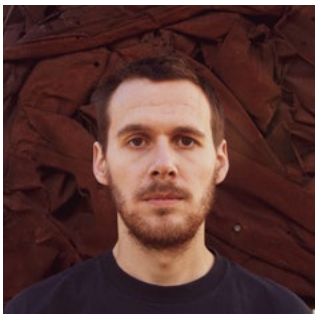
Key Artists & Releases: "'The Weighing Of The Heart' by Colleen was undoubtedly our biggest release," says Johnson. "I've been a huge fan of Cécile Schott's music from the beginning, so releasing something by her was not only a personal triumph but a coup for the label. I stand by pretty much everything Second Language has put out, though I sometimes have to pinch myself that I was involved with Oliver Cherer's 'I Feel Nothing Most Days' and Mark Fry's 'I Lived In Trees', in particular – records that, even if I wasn't associated with them, I'd consider classics."

Future Plans: "I'd be lying if I said running a label is a lot of fun," he admits. "Brexit has really fucked small businesses like ours. Second Language always referred to itself as a 'European label' but post-Brexit, we've seen a huge drop-off in orders from the EU because people are being hit with higher mailing costs, and they just can't afford them. We've gone from releasing records in the low hundreds to releasing records in the thousands to releasing records in the low hundreds again, though not by choice."

Any Other Business? "On the plus side, I'm proud of what we've achieved as a label in these past 13 years, both in terms of the quality of the music but also the design and packaging. We've always strived to do something different. We've survived by sheer bloody-mindedness, despite the odds. We release less records than we used to, but we spend more time making them."

For more, visit secondlanguagemusic.bandcamp.com

First And Last And Always



Warp mainstay **Chris Clark** shares the first and last albums he bought, and an all-time favourite

FIRST

PRINCE

Batman

WARNER BROS, 1989

"I'm fairly sure it was 'Batman' by Prince. Up until then it was singles, and 'Batman' felt like a big deal, being a whole Prince symphony. I don't think it was very well-received at the time, but I loved it. I recently rewatched his video for 'Batdance'. It's genius. Feral, unhinged, virtuosic. I can't imagine someone scoring like this now, with a full pop video to boot. Maybe I'm wrong. It all seems rather sombre out there in score world though."

LAST

BENOIT & SERGIO

Lost Decade

FOURFOUR, 2022

"I bought this new Benoit & Sergio album. There's one track where they just nail the drums and synth hooks so well. It's kinda slow, a mulchy, sweet grinder called 'Pars Autre Part'. It's simple enough on the surface, but hits these magical sweet spots. It's like an old Bangalter jam, but updated. You just think, "What's not to like here?". You'd feel uptight and stingy trying to have a pop at it."

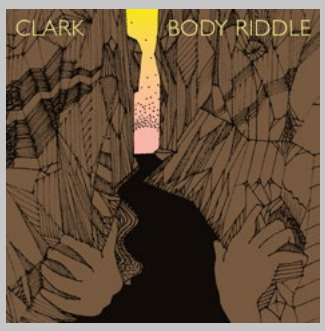
ALWAYS

SHELLAC

1000 Hurts

TOUCH & GO, 2000

"One of my most listened-to albums is probably '1000 Hurts' by Shellac. I haven't listened to it for a while, but there was a period where it was on repeat. I don't really do favourite albums though, to be honest. It changes all the time. Today, it feels like a choice between '1000 Hurts' and 'Bytes' by The Black Dog. But then this kind of disses Can's 'Ege Bamyası'… it's a minefield, this favourites stuff!"



CLARK

Body Riddle/05-10

WARP

Landmark reissue still sounds like the future

While his Warp contemporaries Autechre and Boards Of Canada are celebrated as pioneers, Chris Clark feels strangely under-appreciated. Yet for more than 20 years, he's been crafting contorted, weird and beautiful records with his machines, many of which surpass those of his labelmates.

His 2001 debut 'Clarence Park' had everything from plangent piano pieces to gambolling electronic hip hop, and the 2003 follow-up 'Empty The Bones Of You' veered from twisted synth melodies to mutant beats. But 2006's 'Body Riddle' is when everything started falling into place, and Clark's characteristic sound began to crystallise. Now reissued by Warp, along with a companion compilation album, '05-10', collecting new tracks together with unreleased material and rarities, it's an opportunity to reflect on just how divergent 'Body Riddle' was back then – and how fresh it still sounds now.

Driven by the thwack of live drums, it's a record that sits in between the acoustic and electronic worlds. On 'Herr Bar', bell tones cascade over tumbling jazz percussion, heavily processed through post-production effects – the melodies are beautiful, but gnarled. 'Springtime Epigram' is a gorgeous submerged lament, 'Herzog' has the outlandish synth leads that Clark would ultimtely become renowned for, and 'Roulette Thrift Run' is xenomorphic funk, with fast and loose beats. 'Vengeance Drools', meanwhile, is the hip hop beat you wish you could have heard MF Doom rap over. There's a singular character to 'Body Riddle', but it's also hard to pin it to a genre – perhaps that's why modern producers such as Arca and Hudson Mohawke have cited the album as a key influence.

'05-10' feels different, with tracks that hint at Clark's later dance-driven direction. 'Urgent Jell Hack' is obsidian tech-step influenced by Dillinja, while 'Boiler The Wick' is a slab of acidic bass you could imagine Ben UFO playing. Its inverse, 'Roller The Wick', is a hypnotic techno cut with pinging synth percussion. Then there's ambient surprises, like the pensive 'Autumn Linn'. Delving into both of these records is a treat, but especially 'Body Riddle'. Perhaps we've all finally caught up with Clark's futuristic visions.

BEN MURPHY

ULTRAVOX

ULTRAVOX
Rage In Eden [Deluxe Edition]
CHRYSALIS

This luxuriously comprehensive 40th anniversary edition of Ultravox's fifth album comprises 52 tracks, almost half of which is previously unreleased material. But the original 1981 album – produced, of course, by Conny Plank and the band's second with Midge Ure – feels as brooding and introspective as ever.

It now comes embellished with extras, including a stereo mix by Steven Wilson, rarities, B-sides and a newly mixed 1981 concert recording from Hammersmith Odeon that will likely delight even the most meticulously committed new wave fans. The most seductive highlights appear in the form of rehearsal recordings, where tracks such as 'I Remember (Death in the Afternoon)' and 'Accent On Youth' sit alongside untitled instrumental experiments.

There are also raw, work-in-progress mixes of 'The Voice', 'We Stand Alone' and many others, all of which offer a unique insight into the creative process behind one of their best-loved and most defining albums. **CC**

CONRAD SCHNITZLER & BAAL & MORTIMER
Con-Struct
BUREAU B

The 'Con-Struct' series invites musicians to repurpose the work of experimental electronic titan Conrad Schnitzler. This instalment gave Alexandra Grübler (aka Baal & Mortimer) the keys to Schnitzler's vast archive. She teases out melody from the audio library of an artist unconcerned with music-making in conventional terms, and it's easy to surrender to the desolate elegance of her "Con-structions".

If pressed, the results could be described as hypnagogic chamber music – the dry strings and snippets of muffled chat evoke Max Richter's 'Songs From Before'. The blizzard of fizzy percussion on 'Mohn' is coupled with marimbas and hazy voices, taking us to the exotic sort of place Jon Hassell used to inhabit. 'Keystone' features monastic plainsong, while strings and machine sounds flutter by. It's gorgeous and over way too soon – much like the album itself.

As with Nico and John Cale's best work, 'Con-Struct' lures you into classical antechambers both lovely and bleak. **SB**

VARIOUS ARTISTS
Fictions: Made To Measure Vol 47
CRAMMED DISCS

Crammed Discs' 'Made To Measure' series is the gift that keeps on giving. Revived last year to mark 40 years of the esoteric Belgian label, we've already had a modern tribute to post-war serialists by the ever-impressive Aquaserge (on 'Vol 46'), and here we get to enjoy one-off works by artists as venerated as Lucrecia Dalt, Kaitlyn Aurelia Smith and Félicia Atkinson.

'Vol 47' has the distinction of featuring 'A D Sur La Carte', the first collaboration between Benjamin Lew and Steven Brown since their groundbreaking work on previous Made To Measure projects during the 1980s, and it's worth the wait. Elsewhere, Dalt's collaboration with Camille Mandoki and Matias Aguayo, 'Sumamone (The Free Flyers)' swirls around magnificently, like a ballroom dance in an echoey hall.

But the show-stealer is Stubbleman's ambient 'Ne Pas Se Pencher Au Dehors'. Its rich textures are peppered with drawn-out blasts from avant-garde Norwegian jazz trumpeter Nils Petter Molvær, making for an engrossing listen. **JA**

STELLAR LEGIONS

Stellar Legions

SDBAN ULTRA

This is the debut album from four self-styled "space cadets from Antwerp", led by electronics and sax man Andrew Claes. What this means in practice is a strong collection of future-facing nu-jazz, where the virtuosity on display is always at the service of the mood and the groove, rather than an end in itself. On opening track, 'Alice', rippling tablas and springy double bass underpin some tastefully meandering piano from Bram Weijters. But as he gradually vamps harder and faster, the snares clattering to keep up, it's reminiscent of the great Swedish trio, EST.

Electronics are an important part of Stellar Legions' sound, but they're mostly applied texturally – one exception is 'An Arp In Tunisia', where a twisting synth pattern leads the track on a snake-like path. Elsewhere, 'Jahzz' does what it says on the tin, dub bass and tubular keys gradually spiralling upwards into more exploratory realms, while the propulsive, muscular jazz-rock of 'Wessel' skirts into Weather Report territory. Stellar stuff, indeed. **JB**

3615 NUITS BLANCHES

Été Meurtrier

LOVE LTD

This is the second album from duo Antonine Goudon and Arnault Esteve, aka 3615 Nuits Blanches, whose girl/boy French touch synthpop is about as perfect an evocation of its influences as you could hope for. Their 2017 debut 'About Last Night' delivered its lush fare in English (exhaled might be a better description of Goudon's breathless delivery). It's a beautiful record, but this one's sung in French, and better for it.

The opening sighs of 'Volutes Bleutées' float with end-of-summer melancholy, while on 'Écume', Esteve reaches almost impossibly blowy levels of massed synths and booming 80s drums. It cuts abruptly to allow the discotheque stylings of 'Fin Août Début Septembre' to pulse to a wistful climax in an orgy of octave-jumping bass, synth lines and classic syndrum trills.

It all wraps up with the perfect title track, which channels the Moroder synths and Donna Summer vocals of 'I Feel Love'. The sea washes in and out as Goudon and Esteve intone about the beach. As deadly summer romances go, they don't sound much better than this. **MR**

JUNIOR BOYS

Waiting Game

CITY SLANG

The first new long-player in six years from this consistently compelling Canadian duo is a sumptuous and elegant beauty. Shifting down a gear or two from 2016's 'Big Black Coat', this time around Jeremy Greenspan and Matt Didemus craft a warmly contemplative and engaging mood, evoking the spacious atmospherics of ambient masters like Gigi Masin, Andrew Tuttle and Susumu Yokota.

Channelling those downtempo textures into an easy synthpop, future-soul framework, 'Waiting Game' is informed by some of Greenspan's recent musical references, including Florian Schneider, Sly Stone and Jon Hassell, enhanced by savvy production and mastering techniques.

'Dum Audio' has the breathy robotics of French duo Air, while 'Yes II', with fellow Canadian Alanna Stuart on guest vocals, grooves with Junior Boys' characteristic R&B-infused sheen. Everything is brought together with a quiet dynamism, particularly on the floaty and melodic 'Night Walk'. A deeply rewarding experience throughout. **CG**

RIVAL CONSOLES

Now Is

ERASED TAPES

London producer hits unrivalled highs

The sound you can hear? That'll be the aptly titled album opener, 'Beginnings', which finds Rival Consoles (Ryan Lee West) getting tantalisingly close to achieving the kind of organic electronics he has long strived for. There's a real thrill in sticking on the headphones and enjoying an artist reaching such a pinnacle.

And what an achievement it is. 'Beginnings' is – ahem – just the start. 'Now Is' oozes humanity, finding a curious warmth in machine-made music that's seldom attained elsewhere. It's difficult to focus on an album comprised of highlights, but let's take 'World Turns'. Here, a menacing throb lurks on the periphery like a glowering knucklehead. Then the landscape shifts – chords descend, topped with a staccato refrain and occasional rushes of what could be the reverb from an overdriven guitar. It builds, teasing a climax before dropping away to a glorious minimalistic pulse that now feels quite comforting. What a trip.

The album is clearly informed by a world that's changed beyond recognition in the last 30 months, but West is no longer overwhelmed by the darkness that enveloped 2021's 'Overflow'. 'Now Is' may occasionally glimpse the shadows, but its focus is predominantly brightness and euphoria. From 'Running' to 'A Warning', it's like traversing a beguiling midnight city awash with light and bumping into an old friend.

'Vision Of Self' seems to hark back to Steve Reich's hypnotic 'Music For 18 Musicians'. It's a mesmeric set of sounds that weave together, constantly forming and reforming new sonic textures that evolve and shift. Sure, there are hints of lurking peril here, but this is almost exclusively music to revel in. Even 'Frontiers', apparently inspired by the barren wastes of Ireland, may at first seem beset by an isolationist chill, but ultimately it feels like a hymn to optimism.

The exception, perhaps, is 'Quiet Home', which is both genuinely haunting and deeply moving. Front and centre, a hesitant three-note dirge is blanketed in ghostly reverb, spiriting up a sense of unarticulated loss. Eight albums in, 'Now Is' finds West at the apex of his game. The future possibilities seem endless, but for now we have this glorious accomplishment to immerse ourselves in.

ANTHONY THORNTON

WARRINGTON-RUNCORN NEW TOWN DEVELOPMENT PLAN

Districts, Roads, Open Space

CASTLES IN SPACE

Third chapter of townified synthscapes

"The precise planning of New Towns, with specific zones for different activities – working, shopping and living – created an artificial way of life," argues Gordon Chapman-Fox. "One that failed to understand the sheer messiness of human existence…"

Let's party, everyone! In, of course, the designated party zone, where trestle tables groan beneath the weight of meat paste sandwiches and a blazer-clad representative of the Noise Abatement Society frowns at the flickering needle of an overworked decibel meter. This is Chapman-Fox's third album as Warrington-Runcorn New Town Development Plan, and his unwavering obsession with the minutiae of 1970s urban regeneration continues to reap splendid rewards.

But the mood has changed. Where debut album 'Interim Report, March 1979' and follow-up 'People & Industry' comprised short, sharp shocks of brutalist, council-issue synth, 'Districts, Roads, Open Space' is more airy and organic. The opener, 'Golden Square', is a 13-minute waft of modular pulses, leading into the relentless hum and clatter of 'Community Square', possibly the most evocative recreation of 1970s rush-hour traffic ever committed to vinyl. You can smell the sweat patches in the armpits of nylon shirts, feel the summer heat rising from the leather upholstery of grumbling Vauxhall Vivas.

That's half the album done and dusted. Heading from the roads to the open spaces, the lilting synths and gentle beats of 'Old Hall' gradually swirl into an ecclesiastic anthem, an inspirational "praise be" to the glories of the church jumble sale. 'The Key To A New Home Of Your Own', meanwhile, is the utopian swirl of the upwardly mobile new estates. A beaming registry office marriage between electronic sweethearts, with Vangelis passing prawn cocktails through the serving hatch while Wolfgang and Florian elegantly waltz an upright Hoover around the shag pile.

And to finish? 'Buzby's Lullaby'. Here, sleepy bedtime synths mock the unanswered ring of some lachrymose, late-night phone call in homage to the chirpy avian star of British Telecom's 1970s TV adverts. It's the perfect summation of Chapman-Fox's beloved human messiness, and a touching conclusion to an album of delightfully melancholic nostalgia for thwarted suburban dreams.

BOB FISCHER

REVIEWS BY
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CLAIRE CARROLL,
BOB FISCHER,
CLAIRE FRANCIS,
CARL GRIFFIN,
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BEN MURPHY,
PUSH,
FAT ROLAND,
MARK ROLAND,
MAT SMITH,
WILLIAM STOKES,
ANTHONY THORNTON,
SPENSER TOMSON,
BEN WILLMOTT

BANGING ON

Posh toffs and banjos? King Charles III raving it up??
Looks like our wayward columnist has finally gone royally mad

WORDS AND PICTURES: FAT ROLAND

There's one thing about King Charles III that disappoints me. He hasn't adopted The Prodigy's 1991 rave hit 'Charly' as his theme song. Why, Charles, why? The old King Charleses from the 1600s couldn't adopt a rave track because they were too busy maintaining ridiculous wigs. Charles Number Three has no excuse. He should be blasting out 'Charly' at every opportunity. The meowing cat frightening the horses at the changing of the guard. Throwing shapes at afternoon tea in Buckingham Palace. Chandeliers that make breakbeat noises. With a name like that, he should be king of the ravers.

I tried writing this bit about UK prime ministers, but ever since we lost our minds with the EU referendum, I've lost track of who's occupying Downing Street. We've had 73 prime ministers in six years. Can you remember their names? No one can. There was the one that looked like a mop, the one that looked like a mop handle, and the one that was an actual real mop with googly eyes on. The government's cabinet has been akin to a festival toilet cubicle. A never-ending entourage of bladder-crazed people get in and out as fast as they can, while promising never to talk about the brown devastation they leave behind. Appointed, sacked, promoted, cancelled, beatified, arrested, made into an NFT. Absolute chaos. It's been not so much rearranging deckchairs on the Titanic as reshuffling idiots on a canoe.

Enough about politics. Kings and princesses and all the other people who wear crowns for a day job are never fans of modern dance music. The closest we've had is Francis Bourgeois, the TikTok trainspotter who comes across as a 15th cousin to a minor royal. Turns out he's a massive Aphex Twin fan. But that's as close as rave-dom gets to the seats of power. I can't quite imagine Prince Louis getting into gabba.

And such power. If you're a royal, you get to take over poor countries and eat their swans. Not my rule – that's just how the Commonwealth works. Why are none of them into Snap!'s 1990 Number One single 'The Power'? Remember that? Snap! had an exclamation mark at the end because all the other electronic music acts had used up the umlauts. In the video, a woman said "Woah-ooh" a lot while a scary president threatened the camera. Their members included Turbo B, who sounds like a car, and Penny Ford, who sounds like a car. Why are none of the royals into that? Why aren't they constantly banging out Wamdue Project's 'King Of My Castle' from their horse-drawn carriages? Not a single one of them has turned up drunk to my local karaoke night to slur out a tuneless 'Everybody Wants To Rule The World'. Nothing. Nada.

No, these posh toffs only like prudish tunes with oompah and flags. The sort of music where it's not illegal to pull out a tuba. This classical guff has titles like 'Ding Dong Britannia' and 'Prince Willy's Hornpipe' and 'Ode To My G-String'. Everyone dresses like penguins, and at the end, a ruddy man gets excited and wangs his cymbals together. Awful. And anyway, it's all secretly played on banjos, just like Paul McCartney faked Area 53 on the moon. 'Johannes Brahms' is an anagram of 'Men's Harsh Banjo'. 'Johann Sebastian Bach' is an anagram of 'Banjo Cannabis Sheath'. I think I've made my point.

Charles In Charge, if you'd like to come round my gaff to sing 'Land Of Hope And Glory' to the tune of 'Block Rockin' Beats', just let me know. We'll make a whistle-parping Haçienda ecstasy gurner out of you yet.

TOWERING ABOVE

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